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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this book is to provide teachers of literature with a sampling of a wide range of theoretical backgrounds and possible pedagogical applications for reading, writing, and interpreting literature in school classrooms, elementary through college. The book contains the following essays listed with their authors: (1) "Henny Penny to King Lear: Skills, Concepts, Connections in Literature" (Charles R. Chew); (2) "The Media Writes Way to Various Literacies, Both Visual and Cultural" (Rose Reissman); (3) "The Role of Creative Writing in Changing Students from Antagonists to Appreciators of Literature" (Patricia Spencer Soper); (4) "Symbols: A Symbol '4' the Teacher" (Lenore Sandel); (5) "Journeying between Experience and Symbol: Some Possible Paths in Reading and Writing" (Christine San Jose); (6) "Writing before Reading: Helping Students Enter Poe's House of Usher" (Carol F. Reynolds); (7) "Using Students' Pre-Reading and Post-Reading Writing to Investigate Reader Response Theory" (Sharon Kane); (8) "Reading and Writing about Poetry and the Reconstruction of Reality: How College English Majors Read a Poem" (Robert W. Blake); (9) "Reading, Writing and Impenetrability" (Patrick L. Courts); (10) "Meat and Poetry" (Bruce E. Miller); (11) "Theoretical Assumptions of Reading in the New Criticism: The Nature of the Reader/Text Relationship" (William J. Spurlin); (12) Enhancing Aesthetic Reading and Response to Poetry" (Philip M. Anderson); (13) "Kenneth Burke and the Teaching of Drama" (John P. Harrington); (14) "The Literary Kaleidoscope" (Sabina Lask-Spinac); (15) "What Is the Gap, and How Do We Bridge It?" (Brigraj Singh); (16) "Understanding the Reading Process: How Does the Child Construct Meaning with Literature?" (Susan Lehr); and (17) "A Study of Diverse Responses to an Allegorical Text" (Claudia Gentile and Sharon Kane). (MS)

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READING, WRITING AND INTERPRETING LITERATURE

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ROBERT W. BLAKE

READING, WRITING AND INTERPRETING LITERATURE

Pedagogy, Positions and Research

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EXPLORATIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHING LITERATURE: AN INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to provide teachers of literature with a rich sampling of a wide range of theoretical backgrounds and possible pedagogical applications for reading, writing, and interpreting literature in school classrooms, elementary through college. If we are to teach children and young people how to read and respond to ever increasingly sophisticated literary texts, we need to appreciate just how complex and profound the task is. A thoughtful reader, I believe, can profit from reading the chapters in this book. The elementary teacher may come to understand the theoretical frameworks which underlie her methods of teaching literature while college teachers may become aware of how the theories they are familiar with are used with six- and seven-year olds.

The writers of this book have made a significant contribution to the contemporary concern for teaching literature in our schools and colleges. They have either spoken directly to basic questions for literary analysis and teaching or they have referred indirectly to them in their chapters. These are some of the queries raised by the authors which we need to ponder and discuss with others if we are to do well this crucial task of teaching reading, responding, and interpreting literary texts.

1. What place does writing have in reading literature, either before or after one has read a text and discussed it with others?

For Brigraj Singh, writing in his chapter in this book, reading and writing are not only related, they are aspects of the same activity. Also writing in this book, Robert W. Blake relates how college English majors used varied kinds of writing to help them read more effectively a complicated poem. If what Singh and Blake report is valid, how does writing help students read literature better, by whatever criteria? Does writing serve to help readers create emotional worlds triggered by a play, poem, or story? Does writing about a text assist readers in tapping into subconscious associations sparked by a particular text? Does writing help readers recreate personal "schemata," to use the term from cognitive psychology, as a necessary preparation for effective reading? And does writing assist readers in thinking clearly about a text, helping them sort out and create structures from their initially amorphous feelings and thoughts?

2. What process or processes do individuals--and groups--go through as they read, respond, interpret and evaluate literary texts?

Few teachers, scholars, or researchers are addressing this question. Eugene Kintgen (1985) identified the processes doctoral candidates in English and professors of literature used as they read a dense, ambiguous poem. Robert W. Blake and Anna Lunn (1986) found that ninth grade students used surprisingly effective processes to read and interpret a fairly difficult poem. And Susan Lehr, in her chapter in this book, reviews research which relates the processes children use to create meaning through reading and responding to literature. Beyond these studies, though, what do we know of the complex "moves" students use as they read literary texts? How important are these actions in the process of reading literary texts: writing before reading; reading for an initial emotional, personal response; discussing one's initial reactions with one's peers; writing out carefully polished essays; marking up texts deliberately as well as without much conscious thought; employing various theoretical stances from which to view texts (such as New Criticism, structuralism, deconstructionism, subjective criticism, feminism, Freudianism, or historicism); or judging texts by internal or external standards?

3. What developmental stages do readers progress through as they learn to read, respond, interpret, and analyze worthwhile literature?

Bruce Applebee, quoted in Lehr's chapter, lists four stages in the child's development of responses to literary texts: 1. Narration, which occurs in the preoperational stage but which lacks integration, 2. Summarization, which involves categorization, 3. Analysis (of the structure of the work or of the motives of the characters), which involves identification, and 4. Generalization, which involves understanding of the work and its effect on the reader's own view. Robert Scholes (1985) lists these stages: 1. Reading: as much knowledge as it is a skill, reading involves largely unconscious activities. 2. Interpretation: involves determining meanings concealed in a text or on a non-obvious level, e.g. "We may read a parable for the story but we must interpret it for the meaning." (22) and 3. Criticism: means opening the "way between the literary or verbal text and the social text in which we live." (24) "Criticism" for Scholes "is not a matter of personal preference but of conscious judgment." (35)

Although such models as Applebee's and Scholes' are neat ways of explaining how children progress from literal comprehension to reading increasingly subtle and ambiguous texts, there are some unresolved problems of which we need to be aware. For instance, Claudia Gentile and Sharon Kane, writing in this book and reporting on research with children reading an allegorical text, found that a surprising number of young children were aware of the non-literal or allegorical meaning of a book while at the same time a surprising number of high school students seemed unaware of the allegory in the same text. Furthermore, Philip M. Anderson, in his chapter in this book, cites Howard Gardner's research on children's production of metaphor (1985), which suggests that "production of metaphor precedes comprehension of metaphor on the developmental level." Anderson then states that individuals may very well be able to create a valid "aesthetic" response--to use Louise Rosenblatt's term (1978)--without going through step-by-step literal comprehension procedures. Literal comprehension, indeed, may actually hinder the aesthetic experience.

If Gardner's findings and Anderson's contention are true, then we need to consider anew the question of developmental stages in the child's ability to read and interpret literary texts. If there are indeed stages, what in fact are they? Can children create metaphor, acknowledge allegory, and identify non-literal meanings in texts without first bothering with literal comprehension? Could it be that the stages listed by Applebee and Scholes are based more upon teachers' and researchers' expectations than on the actual capacity of children to process figurative language and ambiguous texts without training in literal comprehension? What approaches should we use with young children to encourage them to create aesthetic interpretations at a very early age? It may be that there are indeed stages in the development of reading and responding to literature but that they are actually recursive. Developing readers, in other words, may very well go through hierarchical stages but may also move back and forth through the stages.

Even though I have suggested that our present idea of the "stages" which readers need to work through to the most mature levels of reading needs revision, I should nevertheless like to offer a tentative description of the "milestones" which readers might pass by on their way to reading ever more mature and sophisticated literary texts.

First, children read and respond to oral literature. If Eric Havelock is correct (1976), young children may need to share a common body of literary texts orally if they are to proceed to reading print.

Second, at the most basic reading level, children must learn to read print. They need to assimilate the alphabetic principle, learning to recognize instantaneously and unconsciously the arbitrary symbols we use in print to represent the sounds of our language. When children come to school without a common fund of shared information--children from cultures other than that of the United States, for instance--they find it difficult if not impossible to read the texts in the schools chosen by representatives of the dominant, middle class culture.

Third, children need to read at what I.A. Richards calls the "plain-sense meaning" level. I recognize the significance of Howard Gardner's finding that children are able to produce metaphors without being able to explain them and Philip Anderson's assertion that if we spend too much time with children slogging through the steps of literal comprehension, we may prevent them from creating an "aesthetic" response to a literary text. My own experience is, however, that before a child can respond fully on a personal level, she needs to have at least a comprehension of words which are totally unfamiliar to her. Such "plain-sense meaning" includes knowing the meanings of words in isolation--the denotation or commonly accepted dictionary meanings of words--and then the connotations of words, their figurative meanings and the personal associations she brings to them. In the broadest sense, the plain-sense figurative meaning of words includes the substitution of one word or phrase for another--metaphor--and the common associations of one word or phrase with others--metonymy. As they learn to read the plain-sense meanings of words in isolation and in context, young people also learn to make sense of the plain-sense meanings of structures in literary texts: sentences, lines in poetry, paragraphs, stanzas, chapters, and acts in plays.

Fourth, only when they can understand most of the plain-sense meanings of words and structures shared by a community of readers can readers interpret literary texts. If reading for plain-sense meaning is reading for what is there--what is stated in the text--interpreting is reading for what is not stated--for what is not obviously not there in the text.

Fifth, at the highest stage of development, the reader criticize a text, placing it in the context of other worthwhile literature in the culture, reading and responding to it from two perspectives. They read it in one sense as part of a vertical audience, as one of a community of thoughtful readers who have witnessed or read the text over the centuries. In another sense, they comprehend it as one of a horizontal audience, reading a contemporary text and being able to recognize it as worthwhile amidst all the texts currently being produced. As the highest level of development, criticism involves all the previous stages and a wide knowledge of a considerable number of standard texts as well as the refined capacity to distinguish among contemporary texts those which are inconsequential from those of merit.

4. How useful for school students are the various theoretical critical approaches to literature?

In this book, William J. Spurlin makes a case for using techniques developed by the "New Critics." Philip M. Anderson advocates using Louise Rosenblatt's transactional approach for creating "aesthetic" readings of texts. John P. Harrington supports Kenneth Burke's theory of a "grammar of motives" for reading literary texts. Brigraj Singh argues for using the ideas generated by deconstruction critical theory as a way for helping students write about literature. And Sabina Lask-Spinac believes that since all response begins with the individual that the reader should first respond personally and then use any approach which is useful.

Very possibly certain methods are more useful at certain stages than are others. (And possibly certain procedures are more useful for certain students and for various literary texts.) It may be that beginning students, after they have learned how to read for plain-sense meaning, could profit from learning to use the "critical apparatus" developed by the New Critics. After they have internalized the "moves" of "close reading," they might next progress to the affective and associative response techniques of subjective criticism, developed particularly by David Bleich (1975, 1978). Or, and I accept this possibility, if Philip Anderson (and David Bleich, by the way) are right, we might have beginning readers start not with close reading techniques but with personal, emotional, "aesthetic" readings immediately, and after they feel unthreatened with such ways of responding, they could then become familiar with the techniques of close reading. It may be that only after they are comfortable with the methods of New Criticism and subjective criticism are readers able to view literature through the lenses of structuralism, deconstructionism, feminism, Freudianism or historicism. Furthermore, as Norman Holland hypothesizes (1973), particular approaches to reading literature are better suited to individuals of specific personalities. How we can discover these matches and how we can couple students with the appropriate approaches for reading texts are questions yet to be resolved.

5. What body of literature--"canon"is appropriate for reading literature in the schools?

Which standard and which contemporary words should students read? Writing in this book, Brigraj Singh states that "The notion of literary canon, if it ever existed, has now been demolished, at least for our generation." Furthermore, states Singh, at least at the college and university levels, many scholars and critics no longer speak of "literature" but rather talk about a "text," the term signifying a more neutral and objective word than the word "literature." The term "text" also implies "any linguistic act," including not only what many have been accepted as "literature" but texts, as I understand it, such as advertisements and articles in newspapers and popular magazines.

If there is no canon for "our generation," what are we to make of E.D. Hirsch's position that the absence of a body of commonly read literary texts is the main reason why so many children in our culture are illiterate and so many adults are functionally illiterate? And what should we make of former U.S. Secretary of Education William J. Bennett's proposed curriculum in literature for the James Madison Elementary School with its focus on fairy tales, myths, legends, and "standard" literary texts? And how do we respond to his proposed literature curriculum for the James Madison High School, in which students, grades nine through twelve, study successively "Introduction to Literature," "American Literature," "British Literature," and "Introduction to World Literature (1987)? And what do we say to Diane Ravitich's and

Chester Finn, Jr.'s assessment of what seventeen-year-olds know about literature (1987) with its implied canon?

What place in the canon, we need to explore, is there for texts by women, minorities, and by writers throughout the third world? How do we determine what works should be read? Who should choose the texts, textbook companies or teachers? It seems only reasonable that teachers at all levels should no longer leave the decision of which literary texts to be included in the canon but need to debate actively which texts should be retained and which should be discarded.

6. How do reading, responding, and interpreting literature make up a special way of knowing?

Bruce E. Miller, in his chapter, defines this special way of knowing through reading "poetry" (all literature broadly conceived) as "sentience," and describes in detail how reading literature involves special ways of knowing. As Howard Gardner points out (1983), the dominant way of knowing in United States schools is what he calls the "logical-mathematical," that mode epitomized by Piaget's theory of the stages of development of intelligence. As we learn to "know" through reading and responding to common literary texts, we develop the "personal intelligences," what Gardner calls the highest and most valuable forms of intelligence, the "intrapersonal" and the "interpersonal." We learn to understand ourselves, our feelings, our motives, and our developing personalities. (Through literature, the examined life becomes worth living.) At the same time, as we read common literary texts with our peers and teachers, we learn from literature how to "read" the feelings others exhibit, how to understand the motives of others, how to sort out their reactions to us, and ultimately how to live and interact with others.

If experiencing literature is a special way of "knowing," what are its features? How do we teach reading literature as "knowing"? Is such a way of knowing overshadowed in our schools by the logical-mathematical way of knowing? How can the study of literature as a distinctly unique way of knowing achieve a position of equality with that of the logical-mathematical? These questions, necessary for the very well being of our culture, we must address.

7. And finally, how does the common reading of literature serve as a cohesive force to bind together the disparate peoples in the United States into a community of people with a common sense of identity and a feeling of belonging?

As Eric Havelock reminds us (1963, 1978), all civilizations rely on a "cultural book," either oral or written, in which the valuable information of a civilization is stored. Such knowledge includes all acceptable--and unacceptable--ways of living one's life: interacting with others, meeting one's family responsibilities, participating in religious ceremonies, and meeting one's civic obligations. Without such a central "book" as a guide to personal and social behavior, the people of a culture cannot become a cohesive body, a group of people who feel they "belong" as a community.

How does the study of literature help to create a body of people with a generally held set of beliefs and values? Does, in fact, as Allan Bloom maintains (1987), American popular music, especially rock and roll, serve as America's "cultural book"? If Bloom's view is accurate, how can teachers of literature help to re-instate a body of literary texts as the common "cultural book" of our culture? What are the "common" texts? Who should choose them?

The contributors to this book, who have addressed or who have referred to the questions raised above, are as follow:

PEDAGOGY

--Charles R. Chew reminds us of the similarities of story patterns and other features of language such as repetition and playfulness throughout literary texts for children of all ages.

--Rose Reissman suggests ways of using the nonprint literacies such as film, television, stage drama, and the visual arts to help involve students in the "powerful themes and memorable characters of literature."

--Patricia Spencer Soper describes how she has her students write fiction in order to understand better the literature they read.

--Leonore Sandel reports on an informal survey she conducted with undergraduate college students in which she asked for written reactions to "word symbols," designed to gather information about her students' background experiences.

--Christine San Jose reminds us that the "richest source of information" for writing and reading literature remains ourselves and describes how she uses "chronicles" to help seventh graders enter the universe of literary texts.

--Carol Reynolds tells how she had eleventh grade students write before they read a literary work, in this case, Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher," helping them to solve some of the problems they faced as they worked through an unfamiliar text.

--Sharon Kane describes how she has students read literary works by responding orally and in writing to a hypothetical scenario and to excerpts from a novel related to the scenario.

--Robert W. Blake relates how he used a model for reading a poem of "revelation" with college English majors, which included writing before reading the text and an initial reading with a preliminary written response, followed by small group discussion, re-readings, revised interpretations, and large group, communal discussion.

POSITIONS AND RESEARCH

--Patrick L. Courts presents a chapter on teaching literature, dealing with, among other topics, "contemporary literary theory, learning theory, and linguistics," using that background as a basis for critiquing the state of literacy teaching in our schools but then concludes by making suggestions for improving the situation.

--Bruce E. Miller advances the notion that poetry--literature broadly conceived--is a special way of "knowing"--what he calls sentience. As a means for learning this special way of knowing, imaginative texts help us to shape our minds to the real world.

--William J. Spurlin, re-examines the theoretical assumptions inherent in "New Criticism," maintaining teachers have not only misunderstood the basic ideas of New Criticism but have also not followed them faithfully in classrooms. Spurlin, arguing for the use of procedures derived from New Criticism, maintains the New Critics always advocated a close relationship between the reader and the text rather than relying exclusively on the text.

--Philip M. Anderson discusses the major aspects of Louise Rosenblatt's theory of "transactional" reading, contending that students do not need to attend to the literal comprehension of a text before they can perceive it personally and emotionally. In fact, states Anderson, "aesthetic" reading may be enhanced if the readers do not first focus on literal comprehension.

--John P. Harrington reviews the notions from Kenneth Burke's A Grammar of Motives (Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose) and advocates an application of Burke's theory in secondary school and college literature classes as a means for looking not behind the didactic explanations--which hinder rather than help young people from reading a text--but rather as a means for looking through such barriers.

--Sabina Lask-Spinac writes that literary criticism "starts inside the individual," with each reader seeing what she wants through a "kaleidoscope" of approaches. For Sabina Lask-Spinac, reader response, because it encourages students to respond personally and emotionally to a text, is the "source of all critical responses."

--Brigraj Singh argues essentially that the insights from the critical theory of deconstruction can be used beneficially by the teacher of writing.

--Susan Lehr summarizes the theoretical framework upon which the child's meaning structures are created according to "schema theory" from cognitive psychology, reviews the recent research on how children construct meaning, relates what is known about how children use the structure of stories to create meaning, and reports on her own research which discovered how kindergarten, second-grade, and fourth-grade children responded in writing to an allegory, in this case, Dr. Seuss' book, The Butter Battle Book. Contrary to the commonly held assumption that children in the primary grades are unable to generalize about literary texts or to detect and create statements related to theme, a surprising number of children, even at the earliest ages, were aware of the allegorical meaning of the text.

New Directions for Teaching Literature

Whenever I am troubled by doubts and uncertainties about dealing with seemingly conflicting ways of studying and teaching language, I turn to the central notion of "paradigm" in Thomas Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962). (As I did when we were in the pre-paradigmatic shift from product-oriented to process-focused research in teaching written composition.)

The ideas of "paradigm" and "paradigm shift" are at the heart of this contemporary concern for reading and teaching literature. Although Kuhn writes of revolutions in scientific thought in his book and maintains that even though "scientific development may resemble that in other fields more closely than has been supposed, it is also strikingly different" (209), what Kuhn argues holds true, I believe, in other fields as well. Kuhn believes a paradigm--the key term in his argument (and I use his words to preserve accuracy), "stands for an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by members of a given community." (175) (In our case, a community of scholars and teachers of literature.) A paradigm, expanding the definition, is an "accepted model or pattern," composed of "universally recognized achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners." (viii)

When the members of a community, however, become increasingly dissatisfied with the ability of a current paradigm to function adequately, there is a period of pronounced professional insecurity. "Failure of existing rules," writes Kuhn, "is the prelude to a search for new ones." (68) I get the strong feeling that, as teachers of literature, we are in the middle of a paradigm shift. All the symptoms are there. There is a palpable feeling of insecurity on the part of teachers of literature about which theory is most useful. From the feeling of crisis are emerging many novel theories. There is a growing sense of explicit discontent that the previous ways of reading and teaching literary texts are not functioning well. And finally many scholars have turned to philosophical considerations and a debate over fundamentals in an attempt to discover a more useful model than those previously used. (90, 91)

When we're at the center of a paradigm shift, especially one as momentous as the one we're now experiencing, it is, of course, nearly impossible to predict with certainty the shape of the new paradigm. Notwithstanding this time of insecurity, discontent, and uncertainty with literary theory and practice, I should like to suggest that whatever its design, whenever students read, respond, and interpret literary texts and whenever teachers struggle to show them how to perform these complex, linguistic activities, the new paradigm will be the result of explorations and discoveries like these:

1. We shall not condition readers to "find" the inherent meaning in texts but will encourage them to "create" meaning, based upon an interaction among what readers bring to the text, the text itself, and the culture in which the text is found.

2. We shall have individuals reading and responding to literature socially, in small groups and in large groups as whole classes, creating a "communal response" in what I call a "learning community."

3. We shall describe in more detail what personal backgrounds readers bring to the reading of texts and how the readers' experience, training, and education affect their creation of meanings.

4. We shall find out through observation and by other kinds of research what stages of development individuals actually go through as they become

accomplished at reading increasingly sophisticated texts.

5. We shall discover what diverse critical theories are most useful for which particular readers at what different stages of reading development.

6. We shall learn more about how reading literature is a special way of "knowing," articulate its characteristics and discovering ways of teaching the techniques of "literary knowing." In addition, we shall strive to re-instate the study of literature in the schools on an equal basis with the logical-mathematical way of knowing.

7. We shall find out how the study of literature can be a vehicle for imparting necessary cultural values and how reading a common body of literature--the choice of texts arrived at by whatever responsible means--can serve as a culturally cohesive force, especially for groups of peoples from as disparate backgrounds as those in our culture.

For a final word about how the new paradigm will be accepted by the community of literature teachers, I turn once again to Thomas Kuhn, who writes, "The transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced." (151) Whether teachers of literature act in their classrooms in ways radically different from the ways they have been in the past is not at all assured. As Kuhn reminds us, neither good reasons nor the translations of a paradigm into practical activities are sufficient for conversion to a new paradigm. "The conversion experience," wisely observes Kuhn, "that I have likened to a gestalt switch remains, therefore, at the heart of the revolutionary process." (204)

Where else can we start, though, with the conversion experience, except with good reasons and translations? The authors of the chapters in this book--by their translations of established and contemporary theories and by good reasons for using these approaches in classrooms--have succeeded admirably in illuminating new ways of viewing the task of reading, responding, interpreting, and teaching literature. Perhaps not a few readers of this volume, enlightened by the reasons and the translations, will enjoy their own conversion experiences and will be persuaded to help create a new paradigm for reading and teaching literature.

Robert W. Blake

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1 HENNY PENNY TO KING LEAR: SKILLS, CONCEPTS, CONNECTIONS IN LITERATURE

Charles R. Chew

Reading plays an important role in the schooling of children and in their life outside of school as well. Although arguments still range as to how one teaches reading, no one disputes its importance.

Recent discussion in the professional literature indicates that reading is an active, comprehension-centered process and that literature provides the content for a process-oriented reading program, offering limitless opportunities for making connections between language and experience. The ability to read and to comprehend enables students to become engaged with literature which inturn nurtures the imagination, provides vicarious experience, promotes insight into human behavior, and makes readers aware of the universal nature of human experience. Readers can learn to appreciate their own heritage and respect the heritage of others.

Recent curriculum material published by the New York State Education Department has captured the essence of the purposes for reading in the following way, and the organizing framework for a reading program is found in the three broad purposes listed below.

- o Reading for aesthetic and personal response
- o Reading for acquisition, interpretation, and application of information

- o Reading for critical analysis and evaluation.

These purposes define the program for grades K-12 and probably beyond.

The importance of involvement of young children with literature cannot be underestimated and should begin long before the child enters the formal school system. In fact, one area of the country takes the responsibility so seriously that new parents are provided a copy of Jim Trelease's Read Aloud book before they leave the hospital with the newborn. Many have suggested a library card in the name of the new infant could highlight the importance of connecting children and parents to books.

Adults must read to young children whether parent or teacher, and reading to the child as often as possible will help to develop his or her language capabilities. You have heard this refrain often, but I believe it is one worth repeating frequently. The consistent experience of being read to as a young child has innumerable benefits which I want to explore in the material which follows.

For the young child involved in this experience, the physical closeness to the adult offers a sense of security and well-being. The world with all its confusion subsides for the moment. In addition, the child perceives the directionality of print, begins to assimilate the basics of story construction, develops a prior knowledge base which is an essential ingredient of comprehension, and receives the message that information can be given and obtained from the written word.

Most should have no problem in finding suitable books to share with children. Bookstores, libraries, and even supermarkets abound in suitable books. The use of the public library, found in almost every community, provides an opportunity to sample inexpensively a wide variety of books. Using the library on a regular basis also develops a worthwhile habit for the child and reinforces the idea that people use the printed page to obtain information, to communicate an idea, and to gain enjoyment.

As you sample books available for the young child, you will discover some interesting characteristics of these books. Let's look at some of them and determine what implications they have for us and the children.

SIMILARITIES OF STORY PATTERNS

You will find any number of stories constructed in the same way. Many, in fact, begin with the same words, "once upon a time". You will find that the story begins and moves to another point. Each time that there is movement of the story line, part of the story is repeated. The Gingerbread Man is a good example of such a story construction.

Each time the gingerbread man meets a new group, he says, "Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man." In addition, the gingerbread man always repeats the list of people from whom he has escaped, adding to the list each time.

In the story Henny Penny, you find a similar story pattern with some slight variations. Henny repeats through the story that the sky is falling down. The story also relies on rhyming names such as: Goosey Loosey, Turkey Lurkey, Ducky Lucky, and Foxy Loxy.

Stories such as the two mentioned above cannot only entertain the child but can help to develop the child's language and provide a story structure that benefits the child as a language user.

As you read the story aloud, you will discover that the child quickly learns the story by heart and will repeat parts of the story as you reread it. Give children an opportunity to do this. You can encourage them to predict what comes next, what words come next and in what order or combinations. These activities can at first be oral and then a time will come when the child can be encouraged to write down what comes next or to write her/his story similar to the one read. Another activity might be to have the child write the story you have read or to draw pictures which tell the same story.

The ability of the student to understand the pattern concept of story plays a vital role in understanding literature. As we analyze literature at the secondary level, we always engage in a discussion of story or plot line, rising and falling action, and conflict and its resolution. Our understanding of common elements and the predictability of stories enhances comprehension.

We know that heroes in Shakespearean tragedy have tragic flaws. Harlequin romances are patterned; O'Henry's stories have an unexpected twist at the end; and in James Fenimore Cooper's work we expect to find "the chase". The student's ability to understand the concept of pattern is crucial to a fuller understanding of and an appreciation of literature.

REPETITION

In all books appropriate for young children, you will find repetition--repetition of words, sentences, parts of the story and repetition of ideas. If we believe that repetition can be one of the keys to learning, then you understand why books for young children rely on this device. You should also recognize that repetition beyond a certain point could prove to be boring to the child.

The story, I Know an Old Lady, is a good example of repetition used throughout a story. We only need to examine a few lines of the story to see the pattern of repetition used in it.

> "I know an old lady who swallowed a fly,
> I don't know why she swallowed a fly!
> I guess she'll die!"
>
> "I know an old lady who swallowed a spider
> That wiggled and wiggled and tickled inside
> her.

She swallowed the spider to catch the fly,
But I don't know why she swallowed the fly!
I guess she'll die!..."

An so the story goes.

The child listening to the story finds that the story is constantly expanded but parts of it are always familiar. Because of this familiarity, the child can predict what comes next. Rhyme and word choice play an important role in developing the story as well. Rhythm dominates this story as well, and this particular story lends itself to song.

In a story such as this, if you stop reading, you can ask the one listening to continue the story saying the next word or line. Such an activity benefits the child and enables the child to do a number of things that I have suggested earlier as suitable to enhance language ability.

In the story, I Was Walking Down the Road, repetition is used in a slightly different way. Let me illustrate by using several examples from the story,

"I was walking down the road.
Then I saw a little toad.
I caught it.
I picked it up.
I put it in a cage.

I was cleaning up the rug.
Then I saw a little bug.
I caught it.
I picked it up
I put it in a cage."

As this story develops, there is the constant repetition of action plus the repetition of rhyming pattern--road, toad--rug, bug--mail, snail. You, as a reader, could stop with the first line and ask what was going to be caught. Stories such as these are easily remembered and develop auditory discrimination and memory, expand vocabulary, and create an awareness of word relationships. All of these attributes assist the child's growth as a language user.

Repetition is not unique to books for young children; and as we explore the vast array of literature, we begin to understand its importance and how authors have used repetition (refrain) in the past and continue to do so.

Edgar Allan Poe's, The Raven, illustrates the effectiveness of repetition

I

"Once upon a midnight dreary, while
I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious
volume of forgotten lore--
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly
there came a tapping
As some one gently rapping, rapping at my
chamber door
"'Tis some visitor," I muttered,
"tapping
at my chamber door--
Only this and nothing more."

III

...
"Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my
chamber door--
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my
chamber door;--
This it is and nothing more."

"Nothing more" closes each of the first six stanzas of this well-known poem.

Longfellow's Serenade uses repetition effectively also

"Stars of summer night!
For in your azure days,
Hide, hide your golden light!

She sleeps
My lady sleeps!
Sleeps."

These three lines close all four verses of the poem.

Robert Frost uses "And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep" to end his well-known poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening".

EXPAND KNOWLEDGE BASE

We take for granted the idea that reading expands one's knowledge base, and as a result much of our learning takes place through reading. Students are in contact with information filled materials in demanding situations for most of their school years.

Stories for young readers also expand the child's knowledge base. The Happy Egg not only has the attributes of the books cited as examples earlier but presents to the reader the egg--bird cycle. The Carrot Seed illustrates the cycle of seed to vegetable and adds some hints of ingredients needed to make things grow. The Very Hungry Caterpillar shows the life cycle of the caterpillar as moving from bug to butterfly, and at the same time presents the counting concept of one through five. In addition the common literary device of cataloguing or listing is used. The young writer will use this device over and over again throughout his/her school year.

The story, I Like Hats, is simply one long list, but the concept development of broad generalizations or categories with subcategories begins with such a list. The child will learn from this type of story that broad classifications can be inclusive and at the same time discriminate. The idea of specialization is also inherent in such a story.

We know that the use of lists does not stop with books for young children; time and time again, students will encounter lists in literature.

In the Prologue to Troilus and Cressida, we find

> "Priam's six gated city,
> Daidan and Timbria,
> Hebas, Chetas, Troien,
> And Antenorides..."

In reality, this is the same device used in the books cited for younger children.

Shakespeare resorts to another method of listing in Kent's speech in Act II of King Lear.

> "A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking knave; a whoreson, glass-gazing, superservicable, finical rogue; one-trusk inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd in a way of good service,..."

Tom Wolfe uses the device of listing extensively in his recent novel, The Bonfire of the Vanities, and the reader would have no difficulty in recognizing this device. I cite only one example taken from page 7.

..."It's the Third World down here! Peurto Ricans, West Indians, Haitians, Dominicans, Cubans, Columbians, Hondurans, Koreans, Chinese, Thais, Vietnamese, Ecuadorians, Panamanians, Filipinos, Albanians, Senegalese, and Afro-Americans!..."

If we begin early with children to acquaint them with the devices employed by authors through the range of literature, we can hope that the purposes stated earlier in this paper can be met.

PLAYFULNESS OF LANGUAGE

Stories for young children capitalize on opportunities to play with language, to experiment with it, and to highlight the rhyme and melody of it. Although we can cite a number of such stories, those by Dr. Seuss illustrate vividly these points.

The quote below from Horton Hatches the Egg show's the musicality of the language and effectiveness of rhyme.

"And he sat all day
And he kept the egg warm...
And he sat all that night
Through a terrible storm.
It poured and it lightninged!
It thundered! It rumbled!
'This isn't much fun,'
The poor elephant grumbled
'I wish she'd come back
Cause I'm cold and I'm wet.
I hope that that Mayzie bird doesn't
forget."

And this quote from McElligot's Pool illustrates how the writer can play and experiment with language.

I might catch a fish
Who has fins like a sail!
I might catch some young fish
Some high-jumping fishers.
I might catch an old one
With long flowing whiskers!

I might catch a Sea Horse.
(Now mightn't I now..?)
I might catch a fish
Who is partly a cow!"

Not only do you get the richness of the language and how it can be used, but such writings give you opportunities to explore the impossibilities that the author has proposed. (You can talk about how funny a fish would be with long flowing whiskers or a fish which is partly a cow.)

Stories such as these (and there are many on the market) can provide a rich experience not only for the child but for the adult who is sharing the story with the child.

Examples of pieces of literature which celebrate the playfulness of language, however, do not stop with children's poems and stories. We find melody, rhyme and experimentation throughout our experiences with reading, and few children emerge from school without an encounter with Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky. Haven't we all delighted in Ogden Nash's use of language and the sound of his words? Several examples follow to illustrate these points.

The Germ

A mighty creature is the Germ
Though smaller than a packyderm
His customary dwelling place
Is deep within the human race.
His childish pride he often pleases
By giving people strange diseases.
Do you, my puppet feel infirm?
You probably contain a germ.

Not only do we find the playfulness of language, but some lessons to learn as well.

The following short poem, while playing with words, also delivers a lesson on nutrition.

The Pizza

Look at itsy-bitsy Mitzi!

See her figure slim and ritzy
She eatsa
Pizza
Greedy Mitzi!
She no longer itsy-bitsy!

The limerick is a literary form which can be traced back through the ages; and although it adheres to a certain form, the limerick's popularity certainly can be attributed to the playfulness of language brought to the reader plus in some cases the message delivered.

Two examples highlight its appeal.

I'd rather have fingers than toes,
I'd rather have ears than a nose;
As for my hair,
I'm glad its still there,
I'll be awfully sad when it goes.

and

Said Wilbur Wright, Oh, this is grand,
But Orville, you must understand
We've discovered all right
The secret of flight--
The question is, how do we land?

We need to recognize that children's engagement with literature, first through the parent and then in the early years of school, serves them well. The seeming simplicity of the early pattern books prepares the child for the complexities of literature encountered later in school and adulthood. The limitless knowledge contained in books dealt with so effortlessly in the early years opens wide the gates of possibility to any reader. The rhyme, melody, and playfulness of language considered so much a part of the young child's experience should not be lost as the seriousness of adulthood takes over. If we can incorporate these understandings into our approaches to reading instruction with the young students, then we will have some certainty of meeting the goals of a sound reading/literature program cited at the beginning of this paper.

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2 THE MEDIA WRITES WAY TO VARIOUS LITERACIES, BOTH VISUAL AND CULTURAL

Rose Reissman

As you try to involve your students in the powerful themes and memorable characters of literature and life, do you often find yourself as a concerned professional resenting your students' immediate responsiveness to film's themes and characters? Do the same students who talk about the current Hollywood favorite and hit films seem apathetic about the concerns of Holden Caulfield and Huck Finn? Are you upset by the spirited preclass discussion on "General Hospital" which is not reflected in your lesson about Hard Times? How do you channel students' critical focus to the exciting possibilities of the universal concerns discussed in your curriculum? The Media Writes sampler of media based strategies offers you a way to engage your students' visual literacy acuity into fusing a link with the evocative themes and characters of the written texts you teach.

An initial media based strategy you can infuse into your set curriculum would involve asking the students to use their media expertise to suggest the various formats possible for any given story. Once you have elicited from them film, television, stage, and visual arts, direct their attention to other varied formats including radio, tv movie of the week, ballet, animation, and music video. Then ask the students to list for each possible media format generated the kinds of stories which might best be conveyed in that format. Give the students a few minutes to come up with individually "good" possibilities for each give media format. Next allow them to share their lists. Challenge them to explain why a particular genre or type of story is suited for presentation in one media format and not in other media formats.

As a media writes "Warm-up" calisthenic have the students read just one or two introductory pages of a new story/novel/play to be studied. Tell the students to read this work as if they were part of a media production company which has just purchased media rights to this well known classic.

Ask the students on the basis of just the first two pages to suggest what media is the best "media write" for this classic. As a means of formulating a judgment on the media way to go, suggest that the students extract from the text key phrases, descriptions, quotes, and style. Give them a few minutes to read and take notes. Allow them to decide what particular media format they as production company associates would recommend for this text. Allow the students time in class to present their own "cases" for various media treatments of the text. At home, have the student write up their proposals for media treatments of the text to the company's CEO (Chief Executive Officer).

As you are teaching the text, take time midway through the unit to pause and ask your "media production associates" to write a quick follow-up to their initial proposals. Tell them that they have the option of: changing their initial media production suggestion, suggesting two different types of media productions targeted for different audiences or elaborating/buttressing their initial media format with more text details. Give the students a chance in class or at home to write up their interim media report. Allow them to share some of these reports. At this point you may want to make the media assessment more difficult by telling them that their initial media approach has been rejected by the company CEO for cost or cutbacks on production of that particular format.

Have the students suggest an alternative media production route and detail how this route would change the focus of their media report.

Once you have completed your text study, your student media associates can dissect the text for key elements of setting, time, theme, character, plot, notable quotes, and mood. After they have listed these correctly on the basis of their text study, tell them to decide as they draw up their final media proposal what plot insertions and deletions, character changes, speaker switches, and mood/setting alterations must be made to effect the text's successful transition to the proposed alternative media format.

Students should be given a full class period or assignment time to formulate a detailed proposal for their favored media transformation option. Another period should be allotted for their exchange of proposed media transformation options. If your school or individual students have access to appropriate equipment and facilities, give the students a chance to create "pilots" to demonstrate how they would transfer text to media.

Many of the texts you teach regularly have already been transformed both successfully and unsuccessfully to other media. Why not bring these "competitors" for the students' attention directly to bear on classroom discussion as an integral part of text study? Begin by telling the students that they are studying a work which was adapted for another medium. Instruct the students first to carefully sequence the order of events and/or character interactions. For the purposes of this sequencing task define, an "event" as any action, reflection, and/or mood. When the students have finished individually sequencing the events in a give narrative, allow them to review their sequence aloud and fill in any missing links. Then give them a chance to compare the media option of the text with the printed option as to sequencing. Provide them with a set of vocabulary terms to discuss these two sequence lists. Among these terms include: insertion, deletion, exterior shot, interior set, voiceover, omniscient narrator, visual pan, and camera overview. If these terms are unfamiliar to the students, take time to review them. Allow the students to articulate and to write their comparisons.

Once the students are comfortable with the vocabulary and the parameters of media/text comparison, allow the students to use these tools and terms to do a full length comparative study of the media version derived from an original class text. Such study will guarantee a close critical reading of the text and extensive expository writing. The student will be actively engaged in the critical thinking tasks of: record keeping, categorizing, isolating relevant details, comparing and contrasting. An even more meaningful addition to the study would be to allow the student to evaluate the media version's success as a mediawork and as a faithful version of the written text. This evaluation would involve the student's inferring the author's purpose and deciding the extent to which the media developer achieved that purpose. Students might also want to consider the extent to which the media version makes "concrete" or realizes the imagery of the original text, the legitimate evaluative questions of whether the media version is "better" than the text or targeted for a different audience. Whatever their individual decisions on these questions, each of these evaluations involves the media critics. They are being challenged to make judgments which can be reflectively supported with reference to details from both print and visual media. Reading, writing and critical thinking skills are being mutually enhanced through the media analysis.

Still another media write approach to literacy would be to conclude the study of any given text by asking the class: What other possible media formats might this text be translatable to? How would the text have to be altered to meet the needs of each media format you suggest? In what ways might gender switches or location shifts make for an interesting new version of this text? To what extent would tampering with key elements of the text destroy or alter the author's intent? Suggest that the students also weigh the merits of multimedia approaches to various texts such as claymation or a combination of animation and live actors. Use these diverse challenging formats as a means of getting the students to work backwards from a given problem/premise construct to deduce the key elements of any given text. This type of media and text exercise may well open career, writing, communications and cooperative learning possibilities for your students!!

The Media Write Approach to cultural and critical literacy integrates various subject disciplines and skills with media study in an enthralling design which develops critical thinking cross curriculum. The media version may be the initial "draw," but the critic's analysis and creation represents the student's engagement in the craft of reflective text and visual reading. Media writes are the route to this burgeoning frontier of infinite variety and burgeoning creativity.

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3 THE ROLE OF CREATIVE WRITING IN CHANGING STUDENTS FROM ANTAGONISTS TO APPRECIATERS OF LITERATURE

Patricia Spencer Soper

Through more than twenty years of teaching I have found myself faced with a variety of strongly recalcitrant students, students who defied me to teach them grammar, writing, literature or anything else. After recovering from the initial shock that relatively few students loved literature as much as I did as a teenager, I decided to utilize the very hostility expressed by my reluctant responders. Using creative writing - their own, not mine or even that of great writers - I have seen students' attitudes change from antagonistic to critically appreciative. This change has occurred time and time again regardless of the genre. Sometimes using their creative writing has brought them to a love for the language of poetry or an understanding of why some television scripts result in low ratings. Once when doing a module on Shakespeare's comedies, the class decided to write their own "even better" play. The result has always been that students leave the course with a sincere appreciation of the work that goes into creating good, lasting literature.

The first step in bringing about this transformation is to actually reinforce the negative opinions that the students already have about literature. Those opinions are centered in the conviction that literature is, for the most part, too long, unrealistic, and boring. With these qualities in mind, I deliberately assign a story with which the students have little in common, one with very little action to recommend it. Most recently I used Kay Boyle's "Astronomer's Wife." I braced myself for the class discussion following the assigned reading. I was not disappointed; they hated it. The story was, in their estimations, dull, unrealistic, and "too dumb for words." One student said, "So she had to call a plumber. Big deal." Several students complained that "Nothing ever happened." At last, one student, totally exasperated with the attempts to discuss such a "dumb" story blurted out, "Good grief! Anyone could write a better story than that one. _I_ could even write a story as good as that for cryin' out loud." Several students chorused agreement. Looking them straight in the eyes and with my best John Wayne approach I told them "Okay, do it." Momentarily stunned, this group, like so many in the past, clamor that they can not do it. They are not writers. Like other students before them, they complain that the assignment is not fair because this is a literature course, not a writing course.

At this point I relate to them a story some one told me once about William Faulkner's way of writing. He supposedly never had a story line in mind when he began. He was said to have noted that he would get a character firmly fixed in his mind and follow the character down the road, taking notes on everything he said and did. "Let's create our own character," is my next challenge, certainly a little more manageable than writing a whole story. Each student is given the opportunity to provide one aspect of our class character. I go from student to student asking questions. Is this person male? Female? Old or young? How old? How tall is the character? How far did the character go in school? Does he or she have a job? Where? Does the character like the job? What does this person do with spare time? The most recent exercise resulted in a 36 year old English teacher at a local high school. Tall and slim, she played basketball and hiked in her spare time. She dated one of the coaches from a nearby college, but she had no intentions of ever getting married. Also, she spent her summers volunteering at a camp for terminally ill children. Interesting character, right? She was even more interesting to the students who created her. The central characters which have emerged from this exercise have been as varied as the class make up of students. One year the character was a middle-aged man who realized that his whole life was a failure. Another class created a teen-aged addict. Yet another group developed a very likable call girl who was working her way through college with what she thought was her only asset.

At this point, it is time to turn from fun to traditional matters that keep schools and English departments accredited and acceptable. I pass out a mimeographed sheet of terms related to literature. Groans turn to smiles as I assure them that they are not to look up the definitions for the terms. Instead, I suggest that they use the sheet as an aid to notetaking, and, yes, they should work together on those notes. As they look through the list of terms, they are surprised at how many terms they already know such as the types of conflict, protagonist, and antagonist. Some of the hostility begins to melt. They want to know if our class character is the protagonist or the antagonist, but quickly realize that without some sort or conflict, there is no way to know what the English teacher is. Despite this, they think their character is more interesting than the astronomer's wife.

By this time, the class is almost over, so I assign another story for the next class, preparing them for a livelier plot than the one in Boyle's story. Richard Connell's "The Most Dangerous Game" has worked particularly well with recent groups. Again, I am not disappointed in expected response; they love the story. "Now, that's a real story," says one particularly anti-literature type student. Others will agree, and some will point out that the reader knew who were "the good guys and the bad guys," unlike the characters in "Astronomer's Wife." Before they get too involved in their comparison of the characters in the two stories, I remind them that Rainsford did, after all, end up murdering someone. "But he had to," they defend. It is a matter of two or three questions before they are led to thinking about why Connell had Rainsford kill Zaroff when he had already won the game. From here, students are easily guided to the possibilities for theme. Before the lesson gets too literary, I count the class off in 4's so that there are four or five groups of four. Students are then given fifteen minutes to establish setting and a basic plot line using the 36 year old English teacher they created in the previous class as the main character. I am always delighted when we come back together as a class. Invariably, there are as many distinctly different plots as there are groups. One plot has the English teacher infatuated with a student who plays on the team coached by her long-term boyfriend. Another group creates a teacher who contemplates a move all the way across the country as she tries to rescue herself from burn out. The students are as delighted as I am, and glow in the fact that they can indeed make up a better story than that "real" writer. I assign Woody Allen's "Kugelmass Episode," and remind them of the possibilities for humor and irony in the life of our own English teacher. The hostility level for literature is fast dropping to a safe, workable level.

Of course, some student is going to ask about a grade for the short story, and I tell them that I want them to have fun writing the story. They are given extra credit for working on the story; there can be no penalty for the quality of the story. Even the laziest student will take advantage of an easy +25 or +50 points. Several weeks and at least four 15 minute sessions into the course, the groups are asked to read their stories aloud. They are quite often disappointed in how the story sounds when they read aloud for an audience. The stories are often stilted, short, and sometimes, even plodding. "What could make this story stronger?" is the question I ask of each group. "Do the characters need development? Did you think beforehand about whether or not this character would be static or dynamic? Is there too much going on in your plot?" are questions that each group may have to address. By this time, many are ready to give up with "This is too hard" or "I changed my mind. Maybe I can't write a story just as good as that first one."

Such observations signal that it is time to let them decide whether or not to go on with the stories. Some whole groups decide to continue with their stories. Some groups decide to take the extra credit they have accumulated so far and try for one more draft toward the end of the term. Sometimes a group will abandon the project, but one person within the group will pick it up on an individual basis. I make no demands. As far as I am concerned they have experienced what I wanted them to, having been forced to recognize that the business of literature is more than mere storytelling.

The task of helping students be more receptive to literature is altered each semester by population of the class. After the initial day of getting to know who the students are, where they are from, and what they like, I go through whatever the text happens to be that semester in search of the dullest or longest or most obscure story available in an effort to reinforce the negative attitudes that are already there. By the end of the semester, regardless of the class make up, students willingly concede the value of the first assignment. They may still prefer something like "The Most Dangerous Game" or "Kugelmass Episode," but can recognize, even praise elements in "Astronomer's Wife."

The challenge of creative writing can change even the most antagonistic student into a genuinely appreciative audience. During the course of their writing projects, they acquire a keen appreciation for the nuances of verb selection. Their characters might "amble," "sprint," or "sneak;" they never merely "walk" once the stories have been read aloud. Students also gain an appreciation for the significance of action; they no longer create car chases or blow up buildings for the sake of excitement. Understanding of and appreciation for the connectedness of story elements is one area that represents special evidence of growth. In addition, there is a critical carryover as students look at movie or television plots in light of what they have learned about literature. More than once, I have had students make the comment that "all those summer movies are the same, you know." Or "Now I see why I liked 'Mash' and why it lasted so long." Toward the end of a term, I am often tempted to bask in the discussions which develop as students defend their own favorite pieces of literature. They talk about justifiable changes in characters and underlying themes with confidence, and I am so pleased. Within a few weeks, however, I am humbled and challenged by a new class of antagonists who must be changed to genuine appreciaters of lasting literature.

4 SYMBOLS: A SYMBOL "4" THE TEACHER

Lenore Sandel

In the classroom teaching experience, the use of the printed symbol often precedes the teaching of the concept of symbol. The math and science symbols of + and - [plus/minus; positive/negative], are among the earliest symbolic forms of language and meaning in print introduced in the instructional program. Perhaps, to be accurate, among the symbols of meaning, we should also include traffic signs, uniforms, facial expressions, weather conditions, and familiar logos. These are all symbols which bear meaning to a viewer. Meanings however, may differ, depending on the individual's experience or association. For example, the police officer's identification may mean safety for one person, but reprimand for another person. We are aware that a schema of prior learning exists for each student before the word "symbol" in form and meaning is used in a classroom teaching context. In the beginning, the introductory context itself is often familiar and concrete, ranging from the corner "stop" sign shape and color to the MacDonald logo. The higher level of teaching the literary use of symbols may vary with [a] the teacher's personal resources, [b] the curriculum and [c] the instructional materials. To this variation, we add the variability of [a] the student's readiness for the teacher's point of reference, [i.e. the teacher's use of an example or "for instance" in the presentation], [b] the student's timing on the maturity clock, and [c] the student's ultimate grasp of, or attention to, the assigned text. In other words, we may be explaining the representation of thought often when the thought itself is not understood. Secondly, the symbol may represent other meanings to the student, causing further confusion. In some instances, divergent language and culture patterns among the students often trigger varying signals of meaning. The variability itself creates alternative points of departure. Students and teacher are therefore at different starting points. This is clearly demonstrated in the difficulty of translating children's books from the author's language to another language. [Strickland, 1981] Any teacher's excellent preparation may, in these types of situations, conceivably dissolve into non-meaning. How regrettable it is when, with all good intentions, both teacher and student share not only discouragement and defeat and but but also peril of that failure's effect on the next episode of instruction. It is crucial then, particularly for the student who has responded to concrete learning experiences, to be carefully guided into the arena of abstract thought and association. There is a wide range of meanings, as cited earlier, for the police officer's uniform, or, extended to a literary view, the wide range of derived symbolic meanings given for the word "star" or "bread", or even the single alphabet letter "A". Perhaps the letter "A" which became Hester Pryn's label of sinfulness, remains in a very real sense, a practical teaching/learning reminder or guidepost in the use of a literary symbol. I often think that the less frequently Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter appears on the required reading list, the fewer the readers who begin to associate an author's use of symbols with concepts.

Interestingly, this change in reading expectations, is reported in the most recent survey of high school literacy. [Ravitch, Finn 1987] Although the English teachers who participated in that research as members of the learning areas committee thought that Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter" was read by almost all students of this age, it was found that 1 out of 3 students thinks that the "letter" in the title refers to a "correspondence" between two people. Furthermore, we are alerted to avoid making any assumptions about the students' reading background because so much of the "general knowledge without having read [a book]" [p. 107] can be derived from TV viewing or other media.

The informal survey...

To support my own earlier questions which arose from teaching the reading "skill" or recognizing an author's use of symbols, I took a different approach. After several sessions of developing both concept and application of the use of symbols in various types of reading selections, I compiled a list of nouns which were most likely to elicit a response from even the least sophisticated student. The informal survey was not designed to provide significant statistical data, but rather aimed to reveal introspective type information which could be helpful in my teaching procedures and expectations. The list of words, [sword; eagle; lamb; lion; garden; bread; weed; mud; star; candle; sunset; tide; grain of wheat; rushing water], was submitted to undergraduate students who were enrolled in elective courses to improve their reading efficiency for either academic support or as preparation for graduate study. The results revealed a wide range of responses, from concrete to abstract associations, suggesting a span from limited to wide experiential background. The variance surely confirms my own concern with the difficulty of estimating a reader's accumulated experience which is, in reality, the "point of departure" in reaching to abstractions. In other words, in the reader's schema of experiential learning, what at any given time is the predominant association which becomes the reader's "launching pad"? Is there, in fact, any association? A close look at the responses reveal, for example, that meanings given for "sword" range from "barbarian" to "bravery";

from "ruthlessness" to "gallant". The word "lamb" may signify "weakness" or "kindness". A "candle" may suggest "life" or "death". A "sunset" may reflect "depression" or "relaxation". For a more extensive view of the range of abstraction, several of the stimuli and responses have been grouped in three [3] classifications which suggest some compatibility within levels of association. [This information is appended to the manuscript.]

The Dictionary of Reading and Related Terms [Harris, 1981] offers five [5] definitions and applications under the entry of the word "symbol":

Symbol: [1] anything that represents something else often by indirect association by the convention of an emblem, token, word etc., i.e. cross, ring;

Concept: [2] anything recognized as a sign, i.e. broken lock as a symbol of danger;

[3] an idea or mental image, i.e. Einstein used abstract symbols in his thinking;

[4] any arbitrary, conventional written or printed mark intended to communicate, i.e. letters, numerals, ideographs;

[5] the disguised form of unconscious thoughts, feelings and experiences, often appearing in dreams, i.e. psychoanalysis;

How clearly each aspect of meaning reflects distinctive elements which become the explorations into language Bartel describes as among the "most dynamic aspects of language". [Bartel, 1983]

Now, in the most current report, among the recommendations for teaching students about English and literature, drawn from the conclusions of their research, Ravitch and Finn [1987] include "The student (can) examine the way the writer uses language to affect their emotions, set a tone, build suspense, define character, and create a sense of reality or fantasy... Attention to meaning, to detail, to differing interpretations and to a writer's language can be a wonderful exercise in developing what educators refer to as higher-order cognitive skills." [p. 219]

In summary...

I submit that in order for the teacher of literature to be on firmer ground in following these recommendations with carefully prepared instruction, some preliminary steps may be helpful: [1] The administration of an inventory of interests and activities may elicit a student's individual background experience. [2] An estimate of general vocabulary knowledge may be obtained through available school and classroom measures. Any standardized measure however, should be examined internally in order to analyze associations suggested by the responses. [3] A determination of reading ability with specific attention to differences in types of reading tasks and difficulty of materials provides further information for the teacher's guidance. [4] Finally, eliciting a student's responses to a list of words, selected by the teacher, as described, is suggested. A special note: for a global type estimate of a range of responses within a class, a survey used anonymously, eliminating any atmosphere of personal evaluation or criticism would likely produce interesting, stimulating and helpful information for the teacher to use in a variety of creative ways. Teachers, especially teachers of English, delight in those students who respond to literature, particularly in recognizing an author's use of symbols. Perhaps the teacher's intentions and expectations can be enhanced by reaching more students through knowing, or at least estimating their "point of departure" or their "launching point". Then it is more likely that making distinctions between and among teaching, extending and reinforcing literary understandings can lead to that ultimate goal of teacher and student satisfaction. Teachers of English are not likely to disagree with the Ravitch/Finn recommendations. The stronger their commitment to both teaching and sharing their own enthusiasm for literature, the greater their effort to find access to student responsiveness.

Finally, I turn to Mager [1962] who said that "if you're not sure where you're going, you're liable to end up someplace else -- and not even know it" ... which I respectfully paraphrase, "if we're not sure where they've been, we're likely to miss the point of contact and end up someplace else -- and probably know it."

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Selected Responses to a List of Word Symbols

	1	2	3
TIDE	detergent; water comes in and goes back into the ocean; waves of ocean moving in and out; high or low tides; water; ocean; wash away; when swimming high tide is better; fishing	passing of time; tide changes as day goes by; overwhelm; peace; rage; anger; fate; enormity; a vast power; morning and night	eternity of life flow; "Tide of Life"
SUNSET	Miller Time; beauty; change of atmosphere; relaxation; end of the day; healthiness; romantic; calm; night; darkness; sunrise; beautiful reddish colors; dawn; evening; settle down	beginning of a good day; life problems; being reborn; tomorrow is another day; depression; peaceful; end of something	
GRAIN OF WHEAT	food; bread; farming; farm life; basic food; contents of cereal; cereal; cereal;plants	"well, being a true American, I feel that a symbol of wheat is partly the symbol of	aloneness; a small piece in the large number of pieces; a person in the popula-

Selected Responses to a List of Word Symbols

	1	2	3
		Communism"; penny; productivity	tion; amber waves of grain
WEED	growth of something new; growing, growth; in garden that shouldn't be; dead plant; marijuana; green, leafy; backache from pulling them; dry plant; tumble weeds	unkempt; impediment or to strangle; an idea or action; negligence; unwanted; no good person	depression; ugliness
MUD	dirty; messy pig; dirty & (rain) water on shoes; wipe off feet before coming into house; mudhole	slum; evil of world; undesirable; if someone falls into the mud they have been bad; desparity; poverty; sadness; makeup; bad reputation; dumb person; slowness; thickness	life: made of soil or water which are essential for life
RUSHING WATER	coolness; spring; freshness; speed; pressure; faucet with water	freeness; life outdoors; having to get somewhere fast; alive; brisk;	continuation of life; movement of life; freedom

Selected Responses to a List of Word Symbols

	1	2	3
	turned on; waterfall; floods; current; stream; swift and constant motion; running	life; "liveliness"; "peppiness"; peace	
LION	"Leo the Lion; King of the Jungle; jungle; zoo	power	leader
GARDEN	growth; mature; flowers; taste; plants dirt; vegetables; fresh produce; picking weeds; T.V.	blossoming or cared for (each suggests life: hope or disaster); prosperity; placing of life; world; relaxation - time on your hands; bounty; full of plenty; food; "Garden of Eden"; harvesting; breath of life; food and life and work	"paradise"
BREAD	Wonder, Tastee, Italian; bake; money; meals; food;	"sustenance"; survival; "Bread of Life"; symbol of poor;	life; essence

Selected Responses to a List of Word Symbols

	1	2	3
	jail food (and water)	warmth; home; symbol of Communion; body of Christ; bread used by Christ; Bible; "Lord's Prayer"	
CANDLE	a single light; birthday candles; blackout; wax	romance; serenity; a hope in the near future; light; peace; death; religion; passing time; life; in most religions candles are burned; sign of unity (Sisterhood and sorority, all of one) Christmas; church	light and darkness; enlightenment
STAR	the universe; vast; sun; shining in night; famous person; clear sky; meteor; Chrysler Corporation symbol	life; feeling of immenseness; knowledge; birth of Christ; life; to wish upon one, maybe to obtain luck; have something to wish	the star followed Kings to Christ; "Star of David"

Selected Responses to a List of Word Symbols

	1	2	3
		upon; wishing; goals; souls; belief; oneness (being one, perhaps - significant of many)	
SWORD	Wilkinson Bonded Razors: battle; defense; defensive weapon; fencing; sharp weapon; strength	might, death, sorcerer; protection; chivalry; power; honor; bravery; ruthlessness; gallant; powerful; power; barbarian	shining - representing knights in shining armor; knight; knighthood; Shang-hai
EAGLE	large bird; carefree - in the "ocean of the sky"; bald; zoo; quarter; U.S. bird	courage; strength; "braveness"; "strongness"; nobleness; "American Eagle"	freedom; the U.S. suggests our country; U.S. way of life; America; land of democracy

Selected Responses to a List of Word Symbols

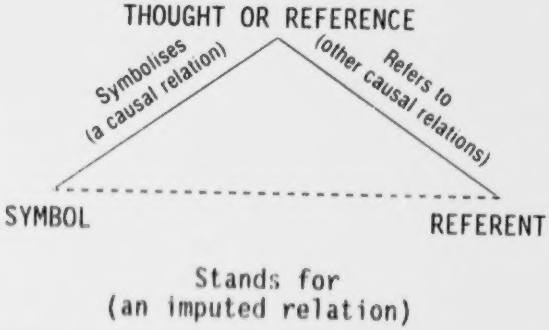
	1	2	3
LAMB	wool; baa-baa; animal food; helpless animal	a sign of calmness; meekness; quiet; soft; mild; peacefulness; calm; weakness; kindness; humility; gentleness; Mary's little lamb; helpless people	spring; in like a lion; out like lamb

5 JOURNEYING BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND SYMBOL: SOME POSSIBLE PATHS IN READING AND WRITING

Christine San Jose

The Nature of the Journey

Long ago, my high school English teacher lent me The Meaning of Meaning, by Ogden and Richards. Near the beginning came this:


THOUGHT OR REFERENCE
Symbolises
(a causal relation)
Refers to
(other causal relations)
SYMBOL
REFERENT
Stands for
(an imputed relation)

Even more than the excitement of recognition I remember the flood of relief. So it wasn't just me: there really was a long, long journey between what happens to people one way or another and whatever sense they can make of it; then another long, long journey between that probably only half-perceived sense and the words they might find to express it. And between me and the talking faces, my own included, that seemingly direct line really was only dotted, only "an imputed relation. I had always loved language so much that of course

I resented being in thrall to the unbiddable beast (so unlike its cozy cousins, _c_, _y_, and Q.E.D.). But at least from then on I had some feel for the nature of it. And having a clearer idea of what was going on behind my own face brought a clearer idea of what was going on behind other people's. More, it gave me a clearer idea of what was going on behind a page. So that even as I wept for Maggie throughout _The Mill On the Floss_, at the same time I was aware that George Eliot had let me into her own personal world, where she still raged, as I did, that such things could happen.

Drawing on the Traveler's Experience

Forgive the personal memories: they have three points to make. First, stimulating and informative as is the professional literature on writing, reading, and their interrelation, (to say nothing of "whole language"), the richest source of information remains ourselves. It is against our own experiences as language users that we must weigh what we read. Of course we have to recognize that we are only one individual sample among the infinite variety of human beings, and of course we have to be prepared to "assimilate" and "accommodate" in our thinking, which entails close re-examination of both thoughts and original experiences; but for all that, when we read about reading and writing that is what _we_ do, _we_ are such as the readers and writers who are being observed and interviewed and sometimes festooned with electronic devices to probe what is going on inside. Second, we have been these language users all our lives. _We_ were those babbling infants, then chatterers, then emergent literates. The cradle may be too far back to remember, but at least for the school years there are probably even more memories accessible than we want to deal with. So it is really rather odd that as teachers we tend to feel unprofessional when we refer to our own learning experiences. Won't our teaching be the sounder and richer the more we can thoughtfully draw on them? Third, though a great many subsequent studies basically support Ogden and Richards' representation, we still are very far from knowing how the mind works. I can only say that to me, the journey of speaking or writing, from experience all the way through to thoughts (concepts, schemata, shaping, what you will) and on to expressive symbols, with its many false starts and retracings and detours, is very real; as is the journey from symbol through to thoughts through to experience when I am listening or reading, similarly looking both backwards and forwards, choosing among alternatives, as I go.

Recognizing Main Routes

The journey in both directions, then, can be long and tough, with infinite chances of getting lost, especially in reading and writing, where there is no face-to-face contact to flesh out meaning and give feed back. What makes us keep on trying? And what keeps us on track, or at least gives us some idea of where the right track might be? The answer to both questions, surely, is purpose. Purpose in answer to the first means that within the whole "context of situation" (Halliday and Hasan, 1978) we see some point in reading or writing. Purpose in answer to the second means that each particular piece of reading or writing has some definite role to play, and there are particular experiences to draw on, particular shapings of that experience, and particular symbols to express them, that most effectively fulfill the role. Within the present context of situation, for example, I see some purpose in struggling with this writing because I want to be an active participant in colleaguial sharing. The purpose of the actual piece is to explain a teaching approach that I have found effective, and I sit here grappling back and forth with my "felt sense" (Perl, 1983) of it, (to say nothing of my sense of audience), so that I may share helpfully. As for the novel I stop to read from time to time, the contextual purpose is to untangle my brain and to reward myself and anyway to learn. The purpose of the particular story I'm not so sure about, and so am finding it difficult to recreate the author's experience (that is to say, my version of the author's experience) as I haven't yet been able to interpret his thoughts from the symbols he is giving me. I need to try out more thoughts, to see if they fit the symbols; I need to muster more experiences of my own to see if they suggest thought interpretations that fit. Without the first--contextual--purpose for writing and reading, I would probably be working in the garden. Without the second--text specific--purposes, this writing would probably be even more convoluted than it is now, or perhaps I would have chickened out of this attempt to introduce the practical suggestions with underlying theory; and as for the concurrent reading, who knows what Philip Roth's The Counterlife would be?

Obviously we need to ensure that the readers and writers in our charge have a lively sense of both of these purposes. Without the first, without seeing any purpose in their efforts, they will at best go dully through their assignments because they have to. Without the second, without seeing the text-specific purpose of the particular reading or writing they are concerned with, they will be missing their most valuable guide. We have only to look at the interrelations between reading and writing for an indication of the crucial influence exerted on text by its purpose. True, the general "process of writing and "process" of reading are similar, as delineated by, for example, Tierney and Pearson (1983), Butler and Turbill (1984) and Kucer (1987) ("Process" seems such an impersonal, passive word for that map-making journey of discovery!) But more to the point is that the kind of "process" for one kind of writing, which may well be quite distinct from the "process" for another kind of writing, is quite similar to the "process" for the related kind of reading. In factual, objective writing, say, we are dealing with the same kind of experience, the same kind of mindset towards it (with resultant selection and shaping), the same vocabulary and syntax, as when we are dealing with factual, objective reading. Correspondingly, both when we read poetry and when we write it, we are in a poetry world. And so on. A great deal of work is ahead of the profession in investigating the interrelations among reading and writing with a common purpose. Meanwhile, especially since we are increasingly aware of the widely differing purposes for language that children learn in their differing subcultures, and of how greatly these differences affect their school work (see for example Bruffee, 1983, Chall and Jacobs, 1983, and Heath, 1984), we know that we need to provide opportunities for both writing and reading that cover a wide range of purposes.

Some Recommended Paths

Without a doubt, the closer the reading and writing to the students' own concerns, the clearer all of the purposes (the range of both contextual and text-specific) will be. But since with the best will and ingenuity in the world we cannot relate all reading and writing to personal urgencies, there is a place for "Chronicles."

"Chronicles" are what I call extended simulations where the students create a social group in some identified setting, and use language for the great variety of purposes that social groups do. I first stumbled into one with a class of seventh graders who were far more interested in the characters and plot in their favorite soap opera than they were in any masterpiece in their literature anthology, let alone the writing assignments in their language text. So we began to sneak a few minutes a week for creating our own "soap," a saga of hospital love, life and death. As the idea caught on, different groups developed their own characters and storylines. There was no formal scripting for the scenes that were shared, (one group strongly opposed to "public" performance compromised and presented their installments on audiotape), but there were a great many outlines and detailed notes. We began to pay conscious attention to the different kinds of talking appropriate to different people and different situations (and actually accomplished more solid work on usage than in any previous usage exercises). Writing (whose relation to the other language arts we subsequently discussed) made its first appearance in a crucial letter intended for one character that ended up delivered to another, causing a coronary. As Memorial became embroiled in a malpractice suit, the seventh graders had to study legal models, and produce them accordingly, including very precise testimony. Then an elderly patient with failing memory prompted a reading of Cormier's short story The Moustache. This in turn encouraged reminiscences of long lives lived in that town and elsewhere. As other teachers got wind of what was going on, they began lobbying for inclusion of math, science, ("How can you avoid it?"), Spanish (the Spanish teacher came up with a tempting intrigue)--but Memorial was by now too crowded with its own cliff hangers to make room. The writing of news releases became routine, as did the blaring headlines they were turned into as our cast of characters extended to include two reporters. Then an editorial in the newspaper (i.e. our version of the local rag--the tone caught to a T) calmed the alarmed citizenry...Before the end of the year, we were in fact exploring and expressing what was happening not only in verbal language but also in body language, typeface, spatial arrangements, music (of course we had a theme song), some set design, and so on and on. It didn't take nearly as much time as you might imagine. Once we're building in a classroom, instead of following our usual piecemeal, virtually disposable efforts, even the smallest increments add up. If Gardner (1983) had written Frames of Mind by then, we would have been able to explain ourselves even to our critics. As it was, the approach was forwarding so much reading and writing that such frowns as we suffered were not from administration. We were also, it may be noted, learning a great deal about language, the seeming make-believe of our community (actually sometimes at least as real as real!) giving us the perspective of observers as well as participants and the freedom to discuss often so personal a characteristic as language without embarrassment or threat.

Possibilities for variations tailored to a class's particular needs have since proved limitless. Two other seventh graders, for example, created the microcosm of a department store and a hotel respectively. The first, the choice in an affluent suburban school, at least sharpened consumer awareness and at best produced some sensitive evaluation of material possessions. The second gave the youngsters a fictional framework for studying the impact of different lifestyles of different nationalities coming to live in a community, as they were in their own real-life town. Reading included both information about and stories from the different cultures. The accompanying writing of both reports and imagined experiences, together with creation of new "traditional" stories, added up to learning with the whole self, cognition and imagination in symbiosis. Similar whole learning occurred in the three classes of a fifth grade that studied the Civil War together. Theirs was a complex chronicling, shifting from one area of time and place to another as they studied it. Now they read the information about slavery, the poems, the stories, improvising scenes and writing out of their felt understanding, writing reports, writing notices, wills, bills of sale; now they identified with families in the north; now they played out the dramas of the underground railway, getting inside the different points of view, reading maps and charting routes, interpreting the messages in the Spirituals and encoding their own in new verses. The tables in the center of their large room, their "pod," were piled with Civil War books of every kind. The extensive walls around were covered with all their different kinds of writing and displays. Between them, the students lived, as it were, in pockets throughout the whole factual and emotional terrain. Another fifth grade lived their Native American chronicle based on Speare's Sign of the Beaver. Comparably, an eleventh grade reading Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath set up a camp, reading and writing songs, newspapers, letters, reminiscences, political papers. A Science teacher and English teacher worked together on a Space Station chronicle, an Art teacher initiated a Picture Gallery, Islands of various kinds have worked well, also Emergency Wards . . . and so on and on. One I've always wanted to try but haven't yet is Tour Bus, then there's Travel Agency, Train Station, Submarines, Advertising Agency . . . How about Royal Household--realistic/fantastic/past/present/future/rich/poor/loved/beleaguered?

Validating the Map

"Chronicles" thus offer myriad opportunities for exploring the characteristics of language determined by purpose, language covering a wide range of topics, addressed to a wide range of audiences, dealing in widely different ways with both original experience and thoughts about it. Smith (1983) argues convincingly that the writer's knowledge of writing is too subtle and intricate to have been acquired through formal analyses of texts, but observation indicates that this knowledge can indeed be enhanced, with knowledge of reading enhanced simultaneously, when reading and writing are sensitively matched in the service of an ongoing project. In Chronicles, students are involved in the kind of generation of text that Wittrock (1980) sees as integral to comprehension, building relations between the text and their knowledge, beliefs, and experience. Moreover, they are working together, involved in interesting processes and generating a body of work to be proud of, so that they are strengthening their community, which we know Vygotsky (1978) holds to be the wellspring of human language, human learning.

As for the contextual purpose, what reason can students have for working together in this way? Language in general, Bruner (1984) posits, and written language especially, enables us to transcend the reality around us and create possible worlds where we can shape any number of wonders. And as Moffett (1983) puts it, "losing oneself" in creativity makes for great happiness. Well, those sound rather grand claims for a simple teaching ploy. All I know for sure is that the students work at their Chronicles like beavers--journeying between experience and symbol, symbol and experience.

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6 WRITING BEFORE READING: HELPING STUDENTS ENTER POE'S HOUSE OF USHER

Carol F. Reynolds

Here I am, facing another group of eleventh graders, the best of my school's eleventh graders, who will be mystified by Edgar Allan Poe. They will start reading gladly, for they know Poe's reputation. About five paragraphs into the lovely, complex story, "The Fall of the House of Usher," the expectation of blood and guts and quivering, shivering fright will be unmet, and the difficult vocabulary and subtle, unreal elements of the tale will begin to overwhelm students. The eleventh grader emits her typical response, "This is boring. Do we really have to read all of it? Poe really was on drugs."

Such responses bring me no joy, so I try to avoid this situation. One of the ways I have found successful in this effort brings about so many benefits that I'm delighted to share it with others. With a group of other professionals allied with the Capital District Writing Project at SUNY Albany, I have been working to integrate the teaching of writing and literature and have found that each can enrich the other in wonderfully diverse ways. Writing in all forms is now an integral part of literature study in my classroom at every stage of the process; from pre-reading activities, to written responses, to initial analytical questions and notes, to a final written demonstration of some understanding of the piece under study, students write their way through the most complex works. In this article I'd like to focus on the writing which precedes reading.

Good English teachers have always prepared their students for the literature they are about to encounter. We've done that with everything from presenting straightforward biographical information about the author to making decisions as we structure the courses we teach. In designing prereading writing assignments, the teacher, as a professional with knowledge of the literature at hand and the students she is teaching, recognizes aspects of the text which will most likely offer problems to students as they read, respond to, and interpret the text. The teacher then designs a writing assignment which will help to eliminate some of the predicted problems or focus on selected areas of the text.

The prereading writing may take many forms, from very simple to relatively sophisticated. All begin in the student's experience. Often I utilize informal writings in student journals for this purpose. I ask students to free write in response to words or concepts which will be encountered in the text; for example, students free write about the word "success" before I even issue copies of Death of a Salesman. I may ask students simply to list words; before reading "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," we list words and phrases which come to mind when we think of our own deaths. Students might cluster around a word which points to an element or idea in the text, such as "charity" or "elderly" before reading Eudora Welty's "A Visit of Charity." All of these are relatively simple, short, focusing writings.

Some of the best writing my students create in a year arises from the more detailed prereading writing assignments which lead to fully developed fictive pieces. In designing such assignments, I predict student difficulties with the text and devise a writing situation in which they will work through some of those problems. I have used two such writings before we study "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Students have difficulty when reading "Usher." They do not recognize the levels of reality in the tale or the many ways in which the story resembles a dream. In the past I have experienced problems getting students to understand that the story might be a dream or a 'real' story embellished with details which suggest a dream state or that it may be both. In order to avoid this problem, I take the students through steps to create their own 'dream writings.' The stages for that assignment follow.

First students list as many words as they can which seem to suggest or be associated with dreams. Then they jot down the details of a dream which they remember. These are shared with the class and we identify and list common elements or distinguishing features. At this stage, I often introduce to students some commonly accepted characteristics of dream states taken from a high school psychology textbook. This material provides students with evidence that their knowledge is valid and gives them a more organized pattern for understanding and discussing dreams. Next students narrate, in writing, a typical set of events occurring in a given time period, such as a school day, preparation time for a date, a morning routine, the closing procedures at work, etc. Students are finally directed to combine the outline of a typical plot and time period with some of the dream elements and words generated early in the assignment and to write a story which is not clearly a dream or a realistic story, but could be either. Students are warned that this is not to be a story which ends, "And then I woke up," but rather a realistic story enriched by dream elements.

Many benefits come from such an assignment. Students' writing is validated when they see that one way to understand Poe's story is to recognize its similarities to their own stories. In creating such pieces of fiction, students as writers struggle with some of the same problems as 'real' writers. Their writing has value as a piece of fiction and, in creating it, they have gained a way to enter into and connect, with Poe's story. They can now explore the ways in which that text resembles a dream. When students read "Young Goodman Brown" or "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," I refer them again to this writing and their reading of those stories is enriched as they consider the dream qualities.

The second assignment I have used before reading "Usher" focuses on issues of the writer's craft. In this writing, students work with the interaction of setting and character to create mood.

Students are asked to list places they know with which they associate a particular feeling and to jot down words to describe the mood they sense in each place. These are shared in the class and we discuss why these places came to mind and what details of each place, not, memories or activities associated with the place, create the mood. Each student then selects one setting to use in a story where the setting reinforces the mood. They name the mood and list details which will develop this.

The next stage of the writing asks students to think of a person who fits into the chosen setting. I aid them in creating characters by asking questions about age, physical description, clothing, hobbies, activities, etc. After this, students free write about why and how the person fits the place. Then they are asked to consider a tension which could exist between the person and her setting. These are shared aloud and students help each other by suggesting ways the tension could be revealed in a short piece of fiction. Finally, students are instructed to develop this writing.

Again students have created a piece of writing in which they work with some of the same techniques as are evident, in the "Usher" story. This later enables them to analyze the story by examining the ways the character and setting work together to create the mood of the story. Students usually noticed the many dualities in the Poe story, especially those between Roderick and his house, and having completed this prereading writing provides them with a way to understand those as reinforcing the mood of the story.

Both of these assignments lead students to create solid, well developed pieces of writing. In creating them, students have had practice in many kinds of writing and in the formal techniques which concern practicing writers. The writings have drawn on the students' experiences, thoughts, and feelings and become a way for students to enter the Poe text, each providing a way to begin a serious analytical approach to the story. Students have written literature to enable them to read literature with more understanding. Writing before reading, whether simple or complex, has worked in my classroom to improve my teaching of composition and literature and has enriched the student's experience of both.

7 USING STUDENTS' PRE-READING AND POST-READING WRITING TO INVESTIGATE READER RESPONSE THEORY

Sharon Kane

I want you to imagine a forty-three year old woman. Fanny has devoted her life to her husband, Darrell, and their three children: a seventeen year old daughter, Philippa; a twelve year old son, Hugh, and a nine year old daughter, Caddie. To be truthful, it hasn't been easy; she has been shown very little appreciation. Her husband is gone a lot because of his work. To top it off, her mother-in-law lives with her and makes constant demands on her time and attention. But Fanny fulfills her role without complaint.

Now I want you to imagine something else. Believe it or not, a movie crew comes to town to film a movie. The very handsome, charming film director falls in love with the quiet Fanny, and begs her to leave her family and come away with him to his villa. He is not just handing her a line--he really will marry her as soon as her divorce is final. Oh, one more thing: Fanny has also fallen in love with the director.

What should Fanny do?

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I presented the above scenario to my literature classes. I gave them time to respond to my question in writing, then I distributed the following excerpts from the first chapter of Rumer Godden's The Battle of the Villa Florita (New York: The Viking Press, 1963):

The Times had had only a paragraph: "Colonel Darrell Charles Claverling was granted a decree nisi in the Divorce Courts yesterday because of the adultery of his wife Frances Claverling with Robert Paston Quillet (the film director) on the 12th of October and subsequently, at Mr Quillet's flat in Lowndes Square, S.W.1. The suit was undefended. Colonel and Mrs. Claverling were married at St. Michael's, Chester Gate, in 1945. There are three children of the marriage. Custody of the two younger was awarded to Colonel Claverling, who was also awarded costs." (p. 11)

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Philippa and Hugh had been told at half-term--"But Darrell should have let _me_ tell Hugh," Fanny had cried. Caddie had not known until the end of the Easter holidays. "When the case is all over, and it's all settled," Darrell had told the others. "It will be less painful like that."

"Was it less painful?" Caddie might have asked. (pp. 11-12)

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"They were there all summer," said Philippa now. That's how Mother met Rob Quillet. I must say I don't blame her. He's attractive. Dark, thin, rather melancholy."

"How do you know?" said Hugh.

"I cut his photograph out of the papers."

"You did," said Hugh with distaste.

"Yes, and I kept all the clippings," said Philippa.

"You. . ." Hugh began, but Caddie interrupted.

"What was father doing? Why did he let her go?"

"You wouldn't want him to make her stay, if she wanted to go," said Philippa, but Caddie certainly would.

"In a gypsy marriage," said Philippa, "the husband and wife only stay as long as love is in their hearts. I think that's beautiful."

"This isn't a gypsy marriage," said Caddie. (p. 20)

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It was all very well for Philippa. At seventeen she did not rank as a child....

Philippa could escape, but, "I work it out I have twenty-three months in custody," said Hugh. "As for you," he said to Caddie, "you have years."

"Custody? That's what they say when they take you to prison," said Caddie, her eyes alarmed. "Will Father keep us in custody from Mother? Won't we even see her?"

"Don't be such a goose, Caddie," said Philippa. "Mother has access."

"Access?" Caddie could only repeat these terrifying new words. "What's access?"

"It means that we can be posted about like parcels," said Hugh, "To Italy or wherever Mother happens to be, when Father says we can visit her."

"Visit her?" The full meaning of this extraordinary conversation had at last reached Caddie and she sat appalled.... (p. 21)

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"We all know what we think and feel but we have to face it. It has happened, and in two months now, Mrs. Claverling will be Mrs. Quillet."

"We have to accept it," said Philippa.

"Put it in our pipes and smoke it," said Hugh. "On our needles and knit it," but Caddie still sat at the table, and it was then that she had spoken.

"What if we won't?" asked Caddie.

At first it had been Hugh who had hung back. "What, crash in on their honeymoon?" he had said.

"They shouldn't be having a honeymoon," said Caddie, unconsciously as moral as any elder of the church.

"But they are, and they won't want us,"

"If we go, they will have to have us."

"We shall spoil it."

"All the better," said Caddie.... (pp 22-23)

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After students had the opportunity to read these excerpts, I asked them to write a free response, on the same paper as their initial response to the scenario I presented. We then used the students' writing as texts for us to examine as a community of readers. Students compared their pre-reading decisions as to whether Fanny should leave with her new love, or stay in her marriage and with her family. We discussed how they had all been presented with the same information, but reached varying conclusions based on their own backgrounds and values. We examined responses to see if we could find differences based on the gender of the responders.

We then moved on to examine the students' responses to the excerpts from the novel. Again, members of the class were surprised by the variety and the intensity of the writing, and lively discussion ensued. We focused on the question, "Why are the responses so different when we all read the exact same text?" Students concluded that the difference had to do with the readers themselves and what they brought _to_ the text. Every individual had created a unique reading.

Comparing what individuals wrote before reading and after reading also led to fruitful discussion, especially when discrepancies or seeming contradictions were discovered. For example, one girl had responded to the scenario by writing, "I think that Fanny has a right to her own happiness and if she's not happy home she should leave." However, her post-reading response had a different tone: "This text upset me because I know how upset I would be if my parents were getting a divorce....This reading tells me that I value love, honesty, trust and the meaning of marriage vows."

Finally, I asked students to write about what their responses to the scenario and the text told them about themselves, and we used their answers as a springboard to further discussion. For instance, one boy, who had initially said that Fanny should stay with her family, ended up by almost apologizing for being so naive as to have thought she would have stayed. He added, "My response tells me that I hold to out-of-date values, such as marriage is more than something to be had and thrown out. It is not disposable." Students used this text of their classmate to discuss whether or not fidelity and permanence of marriage are really "out-of-date" values, and whether or not they should be out-of-date values.

I have followed the same pattern in asking students to respond to other literary works. I require a written response to some stimulus before presenting the text itself. I find that this pre-reading written commitment insures that the students will be actively engaged with the text from the very beginning. Then, by using student responses as texts to direct our discussion, I avoid the problems encountered when students think there are "right" and "wrong" responses, or that I am holding in my mind some "ideal response" which they must try to match. All responses that can be clearly articulated and expanded upon are valid. The variety of responses helps the students to understand the part that the reader plays in creating the story or poem. So they learn something about reader response theory at the same time they learn about literature and about themselves.

8 READING AND WRITING ABOUT POETRY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF REALITY: HOW COLLEGE ENGLISH MAJORS READ A POEM

Robert W. Blake

In order to teach students how to read and interpret poetry, I need to know what readers, in this case, college English majors, both graduate and undergraduate students, do as they meet a new poem. We have a long tradition in the schools of emphasizing the results of critical analysis, the polished critical essay--the product of interpretation--but it's surprising how little attention has been paid to the process of interpreting literature, what moves readers make as they progress through a literary text. Eugene Kintgen reported what the experts in literary interpretation--professors of English and their doctoral students--did as they interpreted a dense, ambiguous poem, "Winter Piece" by William Gibson. Anna Lunn and I recounted what five ninth graders did as they worked through a poem of moderate difficulty, "Every Good Boy Does Fine" by David Waggoner. In both instances, Kintgen and Mrs. Lunn and I had readers say everything they did into a tape recorder as they read and interpreted a poem they had never seen before. For several reasons, I wished to use a poem with the college students unlike the one we had used with the ninth graders, and I decided to set tasks for them quite different from that of talking into a tape recorder as they read, enlightening as that had proved to be.

First, to the choice of the poem, "A Blessing" by James Wright. A particularly perceptive graduate student in my class in "Teaching Literature" had pointed out that "Every Good Boy Does Fine" was a poem which lent itself to close textual analysis, that approach associated with the "New Critics," a "puzzle poem," if you will, a "recognition" poem, one in which after the reader has worked out the mystery of the interlocking elements of metaphor, rhythm, and rhyme, she "recognizes" the appropriateness and applicability to her of what the poet has presented. In a self-fulfilling prophecy, perhaps, the ninth grade students used moves which they believed necessary for interpreting this type of poem. The poem I picked for the college English majors to interpret, "A Blessing" by James Wright, was a markedly dissimilar kind of poem. "A Blessing" is a poem of "revelation," one which would require close textual analysis but which I believed would also encourage many levels of subconscious associations, leading possibly from the associations to a new and profound emotional awareness, a "revelation" of some aspect of life which had not been disclosed to them before. From a poem about which I felt assured with my interpretation, I moved uneasily to a poem about whose interpretation I was frankly not at all confident. Perhaps my students would help me with its significance.

Once I had chosen the poem to be read and interpreted (my choice already implied a value judgment, I now recognize), there were other considerations, such as what tasks to give the students to guide them in their readings. Primarily, I wanted the students to read a poem, write about it, discuss their initial, spontaneous responses with the teacher and with other students, re-read the text with an eye toward substantiating their interpretations with specific references to the text, and finally read and discuss their written responses with a whole class, in this way possibly moving toward a group interpretation. The general plan was the result, I now know, of having taught interpretation of literature for a considerable length time and of extensive reading, especially of the works of a few individuals.

First, I had been influenced by the writing of David Bleich, especially by his Readings and Feelings and by the later Subjective Criticism. From his Readings and Feelings, I had used in my graduate class, "Teaching Literature," his general "response heuristic," by which students read literary texts, especially short fiction and poetry, write responses to the texts, read out loud and discuss their responses in small groups, and then eventually, by whole class discussions of the pieces, move toward what Bleich calls a "communal response." Such reader tasks within the "response heuristic" proved to make classes spirited, often moving, and invariably exciting. By having students read rich and ambiguous stories such as Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King," Jackson's "The Lottery," Hemingway's "The Killers," and O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and then by having them write and read to other students their responses and by having them read such responses in small groups and in the class as a whole, the students gradually began to feel free to write personally revealing responses--many effective essays in their own right--and to insist upon exhausting all aspects of complex literary texts--like O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"--until as a group they were satisfied with their communal interpretation. What happened, I found, was that the individuals became increasingly more honest and straightforward in their writing, more trusting of each other's comments and emotionally open in their discussions, and increasingly cohesive as a group, presenting idiosyncratic interpretations but showing a willingness to accept variations by others as they interpreted the texts. Since the "response heuristic" worked well with short fiction, I was encouraged to try it with poetry as well. Why, though, such an approach produced such striking results, I was not at all sure.

Later, as I read Anthony Petrosky's article, "From Story to Essay: Reading and Writing," I found an explanation and substantiation for why the Bleich heuristic proved so successful. For Petrosky, writing about a text and discussing one's written response with others are the best ways for understanding a text. "We need," wrote Petrosky, "therefore, to share, read, and comment on each other's written responses if we are to understand ourselves as readers and writers and, equally important, if we are to understand the myriad aspects of texts." (20) Writing about reading, according to Petrosky is a powerful tool for thinking, understanding, and becoming self aware and is widely used for philosophical, psychoanalytic, and psychological inquiry. As individuals read a text, write responses to it, and share the responses with others, they are able to put into words many times shapeless ideas and feelings about themselves, the texts, and the world in which they find themselves. For Petrosky, the entire process of reading, writing, and discussing is "one of the most meaningful ways to integrate reading and writing in composition, reading, and literature classes." (35)

As I first read the Petrosky paper, I thought back to the earlier report by the National Assessment of Reading and Literature, Reading, Thinking, and Writing--on which Petrosky worked--and found a practical four-step model for implementing the reading/writing/discussing approach with interpreting literary texts. The authors of the assessment found that although 13- and 17-year old students could read a wide range of material, they had evidently developed "few skills for examining the nature of the ideas they take away from their reading" and "generally did not return to the passage to explain the interpretations they made." (2) Furthermore, the responses by the students showed little evidence that they had learned problem-solving strategies or critical thinking skills for use in reading and interpreting literary texts. The end result was "an emphasis on shallow and superficial opinions at the expense of reasoned and disciplined thought." (4) In order to interpret the results of the survey, the authors developed a "four-step model of the process through which comprehension would evolve." (2) This is the model:

1. Initial comprehension, leading to
2. Preliminary interpretations, followed by
3. A reexamination of the text in light of these interpretations, leading to
4. Extended and documented interpretation. (2)

Although the model was designed for "interpreting the results" of the survey, it seems a useful approach for teaching students how to read and interpret literary texts by reading, writing, thinking, discussing, and interpreting.

Finally, among the works which directly influenced my approach I can identify Charles Moran's essay, "Teaching Writing/Teaching Literature." Moran gave students in a college class on the novel writing assignments dealing with some aspect of a particular writer's performance, an essential "component" which the author used often, for instance, a short dramatic scene, a description of a place, or an interior monologue. The students were asked to become writers like those they were studying. What struck me about Moran's account was the fact that the students were asked to write in the distinctive mode of a literary text before they read the novel by the author. For Moran, as the students themselves wrote literary texts before they read pieces of fiction, they became more effective readers of literature as well as better writers of exposition, their writing, says Moran, becoming more daring, more distinctively personal, more confident, and even more aggressive.

Why, I wondered, would this be so and thought back to my general knowledge of "schema" theory of reading, particularly as Petrosky summarizes it in the previously cited article. Readers discover meaning in a text in terms of the personal schemata they bring to a text, a schema being an individual's framework for viewing the world, based upon her personal background, experience, knowledge, and values that help her shape how she knows, believes, and feels. If such a notion is accurate, then why not have readers write in the mode of a story or of a poem before they encounter a text? Such a pre-writing/pre-reading activity might sensitize the reader to the mood of the text or bring to the surface unconscious knowledge about an experience, image, or mood which would help the reader discover and reconstruct personal meaning from a new literary text. Moran's work with students' writing before they read a novel would seem to substantiate the usefulness of such an approach. If the method worked for reading fiction, I asked myself, why would it not work for reading of poetry?

Based upon this general orientation, I devised the following procedure for student's to read a poem. First, I wanted them to write out in a few sentences an account of an emotional time much like the situation revealed in the poem before they actually read the poem. Then I wanted them to read the poem, write out a general impression of what the poem was "essentially" about and discuss in groups of from four to five individuals their initial reactions. After this first discussion, I wanted them to re-read the poem, more carefully and more systematically and then discuss this second reading in their small groups. On the basis of their two readings and discussions, I wanted them to return to the poem once again, and, using evidence from the text, write out a two- or three-paragraph response, substantiating what it was "essentially" about and evaluating its worth. Finally, I wished to have all the students discuss within the whole class their interpretations to find out whether they would be able to arrive at general consensus about its meaning, a "communal" response.

1. Pre-reading/Pre-writing. I believe we've always known intuitively that individuals read according to what they bring to a text (that's only sensible and not very profound when you stop to think about it), but, as I have previously related, recent writers have accounted for this situation in

several ways. Some cognitive psychologists call such a notion "schema" theory, an account of the personal experiences, ideas, values, and attitudes which color one's reading of a text, while other learning psychologists term this initial attitude as "set," a predisposition to learn. (Petrosky). Those literary critics who ally themselves with the movement loosely termed structuralism inform us that in order to understand a literary text we need to become aware of the generic, stylistic, and cultural codes which are implicit in the text and in which readers find themselves as they read the text. (Scholes). I can't really understand Shakespeare's Hamlet, for example, unless I am able to create schema of the revenge tradition during Shakespeare's time and of the behavior of ghosts in sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. If, in fact, the reader's state of mind is so crucial before she enters the text, I asked myself, why not sensitize her--as Moran had done--to an aspect of the text, be it intellectual or emotional, by having her write spontaneously and freely before she considers the text?

Although I had the undergraduate and graduate English majors write something before they had a chance to read the poem in question, one needs to see the poem to understand why I devised such a pre-reading/pre-writing assignment. Here is the poem, "A Blessing" and the initial writing task.

Pre-reading Task for "A Blessing"
by James Wright

Think about a time when you had so much feeling for a parent, child, spouse, lover, or animal that you could barely contain yourself, that you thought you would literally burst. Possibly you were "manic," your voice rising and blood rushing to your face. Or you were so happy that you couldn't speak at all. Maybe you felt yourself changing into another creature, a tawny lion, a wild goose, a silvery fish, or a delicate deer.
In a few sentences, write about such a time.

"A Blessing"

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
and nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

James Wright

I had initially tried out this pre-reading activity with a group of experienced secondary school English teachers, who reported that what they wrote was too personal to read out loud to an entire group or even in small, fairly intimate groups. It is instructive to note that even though they would not share their reactions with each other, they were willing to let me read their pieces. (Why, I wonder as I'm aside, am I as the teacher a privileged confidant?)

In any event, I asked the English majors to write in response to the pre-reading task. I told them they would not be asked to read their responses out loud in small groups but that I would collect and study them later. Here are samples of the pre-reading responses, written, remember, in a very short amount of time without any attempt to re-think or revise their original responses. Joyce recounts her feelings for a lover; Brian, a love of his wife and newborn baby; and Charlene, an outburst of feeling for an elderly patient dying of cancer.

Pre-writing for "A Blessing" Joyce

No one had ever touched my soul the way he had. We had sparred on so many occasions that when it came time to say goodbye, my tears surprised me. Him, too. But all the hostility melted between us--a false hostility we had constructed to shield us, each from our own overwhelming, enveloping feelings for each other. Feelings so deep, so powerful that our love would not only destroy us, but so many around us. He took me in his arms and kissed me, ever so passionately. It's a kiss I never will forget as long as I live. A kiss with the promise of so much, and a kiss infused with death; of a love that could never come to fruition. Knowing that he felt as deeply for me, as I for him; that our parting was as painful for him as it was for me. I felt so different. I wanted to tell all my friends about his love, but I couldn't. I kept it in, I had to. I felt as if I glowed, though. I felt so pretty, yet so sad. It hurt to love so much.

Pre-writing for "A Blessing" Brian

When my first daughter was born, I experienced a very high point in my relationship with my wife. We had been through some rough times--I had gotten laid-off just two weeks earlier. Gina was feeling, as I was, very anxious about our being able to support a child--not only financially but emotionally as well. Gina had a difficult delivery, and I really felt terrible; it seemed as though now, for the first time in our marriage, I couldn't console her or ease her pain. Then finally, after 13 hours of labor, she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. For some reason, Gina thought I wanted a son. She kept saying, "I'm sorry; I'm sorry." All I could do was just squeeze her hand and admire my new child.

Pre-writing for "A Blessing" Charlene

When I was working as a nurse's aide, a lady with cancer needed twenty-four hour care. It was my day to stay with her, and I always held her hand in hopes it would give her comfort. She began to cough and I reached up to clear the hair from her eyes. As I did so she opened her eyes and looked at me. This was the first time I had ever seen them--and at that moment a great feeling of love trembled through my body. I felt her hand tighten in mine and I know that for a very short time I gave love and comfort to a dying person.

2. Initial Reading/Initial Writing. Now that the students had written about a time in their lives which would possibly sensitize them to the poem they would be reading and which would bring to their consciousness a memory analogous to the event in the poem, I wanted them to read the poem very quickly, for a "general impression," and to put into written language what they thought the poem was "essentially" about. The aim here was for them to reveal their immediate, intuitive sense of what the poem "meant" to them.

Task for the Readers:	Read the poem fairly quickly for your general impression of it. Write out in several sentences what the poem is "essentially" about.

After they had taken perhaps ten minutes to perform this task, I asked them to read out loud what they had written and to discuss their responses in small groups of from three to four students.

Task for the Readers:	Read your response in a group of from three to four students. Comment on the responses your fellow students read.

Here are the initial writing responses by Joyce and Charlene.

Initial Response to "A Blessing" Joyce

The poet has experienced the incredible beauty of creation by observing and allowing his senses to be stimulated by this pair of ponies. The nature imagery fused with the detail of the ponies creates in the poet a transcendental experience. If he would step out of his body, he too would blossom presumably as some kind of beautiful flower or as a wild, free creature in its natural environment.

Initial Response to "A Blessing" Charlene

"A Blessing" by James Wright is about the love that can be found between an animal and a human. The narrator has so much love for the horses that the look and feel of them make him overflow with happiness. The last line seems to be the highlight of the poem. That sometimes one can feel so happy, excited, and cared for that if it were possible the human body could take on a different form--most likely one that is more beautiful than the human body (as shown here as a blossom).

3. Re-reading. Once the students had read the poem quickly for a "general impression," I

asked them to re-read the poem, more carefully and more systematically now, using all the skills at their command for interpreting literary texts.

When I had originally asked the group of experienced secondary school English teachers to perform this same task, I provided them with suggested activities for re-reading. I directed them to re-read the poem, line-by-line, following systematic strategies, possibly thinking about the following elements: images, denotation, connotation, simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and "connections"--such as recurring words and images, rhythm, and rhyme. The experienced teachers reported that the directions actually hampered rather than helped them with their interpretations. When I had first devised the directions for re-reading, I was half aware I had created them to show the readers rather smugly I knew what the standard techniques were for interpreting a poem, but after the feedback from the teachers, I realized it was more important to have them intuitively and spontaneously interpret a poem than for them to follow external guidelines for reading, no matter how pertinent and exhaustive they may seem to be to the teacher.

This is the task I gave the students for re-reading and revising their interpretations, including an assessment of how good they believed the poem to be, based upon their several readings and discussions with their fellow students:

Task for the Readers:	Now re-read the poem more carefully, more analytically, possibly line-by-line. Use any strategies you believe will help you arrive at a satisfying understanding. Mark the paper with the poem as you see fit. Underline, encircle, draw arrows, make diagrams, designs, or pictures; do whatever helps you understand the poem.

As the students read the poem and worked through it with words and symbols, I believed the activity would be just one more stage in the process of reading, writing, discussing, and interpreting. In the back of my mind, I suspected that since a poem is visual as well as linguistic, it would be natural for a reader to react to a poem not only with word associations and questions but also with underlinings, circles, arrows, and other such visual devices. As I studied what the readers did with their copies of the poem, though, I became aware that the process--of one's physically engaging directly with a poem on a page--was obviously a more powerful tool for interpreting a text than I had assumed. It was almost as if the readers, by reacting with words and with other non-linguistic symbols, were revising the poem in order to recreate their own interpretations, to re-construct their versions of reality. This stage in the process of interpreting a poem was more potent than I had imagined.

Visual and Linguistic Techniques to Recreate a Poem

Visual Techniques. One needs to study the protocols of the students' marking of their poems to see how they used visual techniques to read a poem--re-create it, I'd rather say--but let me describe the non-linguistic symbols they used for "wrestling" with the meaning of "A Blessing."

As I examined the protocols, I was first struck by the numerous visual signs, but as I looked at them more closely, I realized they were actually few in kind and were primarily used to relate and connect words, phrases, and questions jotted down in the margins of the sheets on which the poem was printed. Several readers, in fact, did without visual devices, using words only as designators and connectors. In terms of the alphabetic principle, the visual symbols--other than letters--available to readers are actually very few compared with the potentially infinite number of combinations of letters for producing words available to us through the alphabet. (Havelock). It's only with words, derived from the arbitrary arrangement of letters by the alphabetic principle, that one is able to relate the complexity of a literary text, in this case, a poem such as "A Blessing."

The readers, therefore, no doubt following my directions, used these non-alphabetic symbols to help them in reconstructing their versions of the poem. They underlined--a traditional academic activity during reading--and encircled words and phrases. They numbered sections and connected parts of the poem with brackets. One reader enclosed words in a horizontal diamond. Some used arrows to point: single-shafted, double-shafted, and even the elegant arrows I associate with those used in diagrams made by engineers. I wondered what special significance there was to the arrows--there were so many of them--until I realized they were used to connect words and phrases to written comments jotted down in a single-spaced copy of the poem. (In the future, I'll let students react on double-spaced copies.) One reader was fond of the asterisk. Some readers connected elements with parentheses, brackets, and even with angled lines. A couple of readers drew maps and pictures, as I had suggested, showing the relationships in the poem among the elements of the highway, the barbed wire, and the pasture.

Linguistic Techniques.

If the visual symbols were relatively few in number and simple to identify and categorize, the complex use of words was another matter altogether.

Asking Questions and Talking to One's Self. I couldn't help but wonder whether the act of writing out questions to one's self and answering them on paper which I observed on the protocols was an example of what Moffett calls "liberating inner speech" (Moffett). For Moffett, one stops thinking--especially about old ideas--in order to let new thoughts come into the mind. We liberate "inner speech" by meditating or by writing, continues Moffett, so that we may surprise ourselves with novel ideas and re-combinations of old ideas. What happens is this: "To think of new things, and of old things in new ways, they [student writers] will need to start with something familiar and go somewhere with it they haven't been before." (307). Perhaps, in a like way, readers of an unfamiliar, worthwhile poem, by talking to themselves, by asking themselves questions about the text, allow new ideas to enter their minds. By "liberating inner speech," they think unfamiliar thoughts, they create strikingly new structures, they reconstruct reality.

Here are some of the questions written out by the readers on their copies of the poems, with key phrases from the poem in quotations which triggered the questions. In almost all cases, except where they would have been unintelligible, the original, immediate phrasings have been retained.

> Why the title: What about "we"? What happened to the "we"?
> "black and white"--Is this necessary?
> "light breeze"--Why does the breeze move him?
> "into blossom"--does "blossom" have anything to do with "Tufts of spring"?
> "ripple tensely"--how does tensely and happiness go together?
> "wet swans"--wet from the night dew?

Interpreting. Try as I might, I could find few other categories besides those of asking questions and interpreting. I tried to fit comments into categories of "associating" or "rephrasing" or "paraphrasing," but the more I looked at the responses, the more I was convinced they represented interpretation, from explaining what single words meant to fully realized interpretations of the entire poem. Here are some examples of the interpretive responses, again with key phrases from the poem in quotes.

"A Blessing"--to bless--to sanctify--those who receive love are blessed
"break"--burst
"twilight bounds"--moon is coming up
"off the highway"--road as in a journey
"Rochester, Minnesota"--concrete, worldly juxtaposed with nature imagery
"willows"--forest--unconscious--irrational--womb
"barbed wire"--beauty of wire another paradox --barbed in--metaphor for soul barbed in
"tufts of spring"--begins as a metaphor of complete communion with nature--not grass but "tufts of spring"
"break into blossom"--explode to ecstasy--perfection
"ripple tensely"--almost visceral response
"munching"--prior to sharing "to partake" break bread together
"hold the slenderer one"--transfer of love to everything
"skin over a girl's wrist"--pure
--if the ponies eat the tufts of spring (flower has turned into and he will become one with them)
--under extremes of emotions, one can feel like turning into other existences, even though this happiness is aroused by gentle loving animals
--he realizes that there is so much love and joy within him that the feeling is almost too much--he could become something he isn't
--paradoxical language creates tone of, well, "loneliness" coupled with nature imagery--beautiful--creates sense of singleness; aloneness from other creatures, but communion with the sensual, nature, the unconscious. Leads to the final realization that the soul--the separate spirit--can--"blossom" and grow in nature. Possibly--to live, one must have love. To know it and experience it is "A Blessing. "

4. Continued Discussion. After the students had re-read the poem more carefully, more analytically, I asked them to return to their small groups for a review of their original interpretations. My aim was to have them continue with finer, more detailed, perhaps with more mature and sophisticated interpretations of the poem.

Task for the Readers:	Discuss your re-reading in the same group of students. Again, what is the poem "essentially" about?

5. Re-writing (Extended Interpretation with Documentation). I now wanted to let students write more extended interpretations of perhaps two or three paragraphs, based upon their pre-reading/pre-writing samples, their initial written response, their in-depth re-reading of the poem, and their discussions of the poem and their reactions with their fellow students. Furthermore, I wanted them to assess the value of the poem, based upon their considerable reconstruction of the text.

I realized that they wouldn't have time to produce a polished, carefully revised critical essay, but I really didn't want them to be removed from the immediate situation of interpreting the poem and wished them to create a more detailed response than their initial, short responses, but one which was still fresh and immediate.

Task for the Readers:	On the basis of your two readings and discussion, now write out a one- or two-paragraph response to the text. What is the poem "essentially" about? Use evidence from the poem to justify your interpretation. How good is the poem? On what do you base your judgment?

Here are samples of the final, written interpretations, with assessments of the value of the poem, by Charlene, Brian, and Joyce.

Revision, with Evaluation, of "A Blessing" Charlene

The poem, "A Blessing," is about an incident that brings a person to the height of love and happiness. The setting--twilight, spring, and a light breeze--, along with the beauty and friendship of the horses brings the narrator to a point of jubilation, one that goes unnoticed until almost the end of the poem where he states, "Suddenly I realize."

It seems he didn't quite know the feeling existed within his body, but when he did it was so intense that for a split moment, "if [he] stepped out of [his] body," he would burst open into a full blossom.

I consider this poem quite good because, though I haven't experienced it in quite the same way, it brings feeling to me that dulls my heart. Not a blunt dull one, but a sharp one. Where the feeling is aroused and the heart translates it to the mind and memory.

Revision, with Evaluation, of "A Blessing" Brian

I think that this poem deals with love. The persona seems to have an impediment of some kind that prevents him from fulfilling his love. He feels he has to step out of his body in order to "break into blossom." This idea of love unfulfilled, or possibly love/hate is represented by contrasts such as "black & white," "loneliness" and "love," etc. The "slenderer one" seems to associate with the earlier reference to "my friend," as well as the more obvious pony.

The concept of unfulfilled love is represented also where the poem reads "They have been grazing all alone."

I think this is a very good poem because it is capable of giving birth to many "interpretations." Thus the poem is very rich in meaning. And invites one to re-read and re-read, never believing that the piece has been exhausted.

Revision, with Evaluation, of "A Blessing" Joyce

This poem is essentially about the poet's experience in a field and how it affects him. I see essentially 3 levels of division in the poem. The poet leaves the highway--or the world of man. He & his friend step over the barbed wire. The world of man is the first level. Then they are in the pasture with the ponies. That is the second realm. The poet takes in all the imagery which surrounds him and he feels that if he could step outside his body, he would blossom. That is the third realm, a transcendental experience caused by this communing with the ponies.

I think this is a good poem because I like the imagery. I feel the pony nuzzle his hand, I see the ponies as sleek wet swans. Their shyness and their love touch me. I can hear them bound softly on the grass. I can emphasize with the poet and the incredible joy he feels within. I can clearly picture this situation and since I am very much an outdoors person, I am deeply touched by all of this. What I wonder about is the "we" that was mentioned. The ponies welcome them--the poet and his friend. I as a reader, too, feel welcomed. The poem gave me a feeling of peace and recalled the wonders of creation for me. This poet is sensitive to nature & realizes that the natural world is in fact a blessing.

6. General Discussion (Whole Group). For a final activity, I wanted to move all of the readers from working individually and discussing in small groups to a consideration of the poem in the total group, to find out whether or not we would approach a "communal response." By "communal" I don't mean a narrow, straight-jacketed, identical interpreta-

tion but rather an agreement about the general features of the poem--although I would expect individual, idiosyncratic responses--a consensus, if you will, about the overall meaning of the poem. These are the questions I addressed to the whole group.

Task for the Readers:	Has your response changed in any significant way from the initial reading? Explain. Does your small group generally agree on the interpretation of the poem? Does the whole class generally agree on the essential meaning of the poem?

What do I make of this attempt to engage undergraduate and graduate English majors--fairly experienced and sophisticated readers--in interpreting an ambiguous but rich and worthwhile poem?

There is no doubt in my mind that what I asked the students to do was an intense and complicated procedure, but my primary aim was to have them become emotionally involved in a poem, not to have them just solve a linguistic puzzle. I wanted to provide a way for them to enter a poem, to see how they could consider various aspects of the poem, returning to the elements several times for increasingly richer responses, to reconstruct their own version of reality triggered by the poetic text. The students were not expected to produce a polished critical essay on the poem, for that was not my ultimate purpose; rather I wanted them to give immediate, uninhibited responses, successively refined by small group discussions and first draft written responses, to a poetic text.

As far as an assessment of the effectiveness of the various stages in the process is concerned, I can only venture opinions based upon my observations, what the students wrote, and what they said at the end of the period.

It is difficult for me to make any one-to-one connections between the prewriting task for sensitizing students to the emotional tone of the poem and their interpretations, for the human mind is too rich and flexible to permit this, but some of the students, in comments like these, reported that the prewriting task did, to some extent, accomplish its purpose. One student said, "It started to move my thinking into a subjective mode." Another stated, "I had never thought of turning into something else--like a 'blossom.'" Possibly as evidence that they were deeply involved in creating the prereading task, several students said they were frustrated when I asked them to finish what they were writing and move on to the next task. This comment is representative of the ones made about this problem. "I was very jealous of my own world. I didn't want to be interrupted by you [the teacher] when I was in a feeling mode." The primary problem with this task, as I see it, lies in designing prereading tasks which reflect the poem to be read but which at the same time do not focus the students' attention on too restrictive a response.

There are several advantages to the students' reading their responses and revised responses to the poem in small groups. First, by having students read out loud their responses in groups of from four to five individuals, I made sure each student would enjoy the luxury of reading her response out loud and having it commented on by others. In addition, since the groups were small, individuals who might have remained silent in an entire group of twenty-five or thirty students were not as intimidated as they might have been by compulsive talkers and became less inhibited in their contributions to the discussion. Several students reported that the conversations helped them with their interpretations. These are representative comments:

> "The whole group is drawing on each other."
> "The discussion reinforced my interpretation."

"I began to see this [an interpretation] as people talked."
"My response was enriched as other people talked."

From my observation, the students in the small groups discussed their interpretations animatedly and often heatedly. It is probably pertinent to point out that this class took place late in the semester, after the students had had considerable experience working in small groups, observing guidelines for group behavior, such as describing, not evaluating; respecting each other's opinions and trying to see each other's point of view; and generally respecting what each had to say and learning to encourage each other to offer responses to a text without fear of criticism or sarcasm.

For the most part, at the end of the process, as they responded as members of the entire group, few reported they had changed their initial, immediate interpretation of the poem. There were, to be sure, many different opinions involving the meaning of specific words or phrases, but generally speaking, they all agreed on the overall meaning of the poem. One student, however, did note that, after hearing other responses, she changed her original, harshly critical estimation of the poem to a more appreciative one. She wrote, "I changed my initial, smug interpretation."

Sophisticated readers of literary texts probably would profit from such a procedure only once or twice. Experienced teachers of English reported the guidelines for following the elements of a particular critical apparatus restricted their responses. On the other hand, very unsophisticated readers do need to learn the strategies for reading and responding to mature literary texts.

The importance of the students' marking up their copies of the poem continues to amaze me. Researchers in the writing of very young children report that preparatory to writing, children draw pictures and talk to themselves. I was surprised to find that mature men and women do the same thing, it seems to me, as a way of dealing with a poem. And very possibly, as they talked to themselves, they were, as Moffett suggests, liberating inner speech in order to accommodate fresh and novel responses to the poem.

The movement from the response of a solitary individual to the interaction among individuals within small groups to the discussion among members of the whole class was crucial. The tasks were teacher devised but student executed, and it seems evident that by this progression the power of the group as well as the potential of each individual was tapped.

Even though the approach may have been too involved and too structured, I remain convinced that the general activities of writing, reading, and responding and discussing these responses with others--of ultimately reconstructing new texts--are useful for individuals to learn how to read and interpret ambiguous, sophisticated and worthwhile poems.

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9 READING, WRITING AND IMPENETRABILITY

Patrick L. Courts

In explaining the inherent value of "un-birthdays" to Alice, that rather feisty egg, Humpty Dumpty, asserts that there are 364 un-birthdays on which one receives presents, but

> "...only one for birthday presents, you know. There's glory for you!" "I don't know what you mean by 'glory," Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't--till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean a nice knock down argument," Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The questions is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master---that's all." Alice was too much puzzled to say anything; so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them--particularly verbs: they're the proudest--adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs--however, I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That's what I say!" (Lewis Carroll, "Through the Looking Glass," 161)

(As any child knows, Humpty's apparently short, exciting career comes to a crashing end when he falls off his wall and not even "all the kings horses and all the kings men" can put him "together again." And though it cannot be absolutely proven, it has been rumored that his assertion of individual power over meaning, the right to decide what words mean, caused that shattering fall.)

Any essay that purports to discuss contemporary literary theory, learning theory, and linguistics, using that discussion to critique the current state of literacy in our schools, and end with some constructive suggestions for change should immediately be suspect. And if it purports to do all or any of this "briefly," it might just as well begin in Wonderland with the rotund philosopher, Humpty Dumpty.

Having quickly accomplished all that, and like the White Rabbit, always/already "late," let us begin then with post-structuralism: to the extent that contemporary literary theorists (including a broad range of philosophers and psychologists) share a common ground, it is in their attempts to discuss the "problem of meaning": whether it exists (i.e., in the contextually boundless world of oppositions and reversals of deconstruction, once inserted into the machine of language, and in a world characterized entirely by the instability of constant, infinite change and motion, how can we discuss meaning?); how it came into existence (if it exists, who made it? He who made the lamb?); where does it reside (within texts existing in boundless contexts? within human beings--reader/writer/speaker/listener--within signs [and what is a sign that it may be read by whom and how did it acquire meaning?]?); how is it identified (communally when communities agree on a meaning? in terms of describable speech-acts? through the application of paradigms like those of Marxists, feminists, Freudians, or through the application of all of the above leading to countless, infinite, equally defensible, equally valid meanings in the midst of no definition of validity or meaning)? (see Culler, Norris, Bruner, Austin, Searle, Derrida).

Surely this puts us too close to Alice's position in Wonderland--too many questions piling up behind me and I'm not writing fast enough or little enough--no time, no time.

Jump then to psycholinguistics and the various applications that have been made to the reading process. Go backwards to structuralism for the moment (Saussure). Bracket the mad spiral engendered by post-structuralism and deconstruction (Derrida)--a spiral that itself does not exist accept in the imagined structure of spirals. Go to Language. Now say and believe: Language exists, and it functions according to rules. Necessarily, of course, bracket the debates between and Chomsky and others (Piatelli-Palmareni). Decide that nativistic vs mentalistic issues are undecidable (Gardner, Ch. 7). Give up the impossible questions and don't ask where it came from or how it began--some things are impossible to know. Posit a Language Acquisition Device and call it LAD (Chomsky). Through this imaginative act, substantiated by nothing other than the human imagination and apparent ability to create meaning in the midst of meaninglessness--through this enormously important act affirm a governing rule-structure for Language. Humans learn this thing called language because they have LAD. Because humans are able to learn language, they do so. Language is inherently human. Humans intuit the underlying rule structure of language as a result of their creative (not simply behavioral) interactions with other language users because they need it to survive. But this survival is not simply a matter of being able to ask for food and water, it is not simply a matter of basic communication. Once the individual has intuited (or learned or acquired) this underlying rule system (Language), she can create structures and sentences that she has never before heard. For the time being, don't worry about what that assertion does to structuralism.

And there it is. Meaning resides in the human being by virtue of the rule-structure of language; and by virtue of that rule-structure, by virtue of Language, human beings can create meaning. (So Humpty was "a little right and a little wrong"?)

But don't stop there. Consider that, at the same time this thing called Language is based on a rule structure or "deep-structure," it is a deep-structure that is constantly in the process of evolving because language-users can create meaning, and meaning is generated through the structure. Therefore, Language, this underlying structure is not only learned by virtue of the fact that humans are able to learn it, but it is also created by those who learn it as they learn it and change it continually. Moreover, it is through Language that humans structure their whole world: language is that which both contains meaning and through which meaning is made. Meaning resides in language. Language resides in humans. Humans reside in language. Ask, "What is the nature of a structure infinitely created by those who reside within it and because of it?"

Humans learn language because they are able to because they are human (or they are human because they are able to learn language and do so). Humans generate, create, make meaning and change language in the process of learning it, and so it follows that they change and create the underlying rule structure that they learn because it exists, and they are uniquely able to learn it because they are human.

Move dangerously close to the mad spiral again. But before falling off the wall or into the abyss, as did Humpty shortly after he confirmed himself in charge of meaning, perhaps we had better simply apply the theory to reading and writing. After all, everyone else does.

Reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game (Kenneth Goodman). Reading is the application of non-visual information or a "theory of the world in the head" (Frank Smith), schema theory, underlying rule structure, deep structure--as you can see, it is terribly difficult to escape the spiral--it is the application of non-visual information, which is both created and implemented through some enabling system (LAD) (SELF) (EGO) (TRANSFORMATIONAL DEEP STRUCTURE) (SOUL) (SPIRIT) (UNDERLYING RULE SYSTEM), to that which is visible (the text, the world, whatever is Other).

Reading is not "decoding" words printed on paper in order simply to receive the information intended by the author. Reading is the process by which the reader makes meaning of the text by employing all her language ability to matching features in the text with the meaning-making structures she has by virtue of being human. Reading is the process, in terms of cognitive psychologists, of creating relationships--categorical and hierarchical relationships--by matching and manipulating that which is in the text to that which is in the reader in order to produce new, fuller, more complex cognitive schemata (Frank Smith). The more the reader already knows about that which is in the text, the more the reader can create from that which is in the text; the reader who already has an enormous amount of non-visual information about that which is in the text is able to make "more" meaning more "easily" than the reader who has little non-visual information about that which is in the text. But this non-visual information is more than a body of facts about 'stuff'; call it non-visual information, long-term memory or cognitive schemata, it is genuinely a theory of how the world has, does, and will operate. Having intuited or learned or produced a theory of what the world is like and how it operates, the reader applies this theory of the world to all that she reads in order to make sense of it. If what is being read radically differs from her theory or barely fits it at all, she will have significant difficulty understanding what she is reading because, at the same time she is trying to apply past categories and hierarchies that make up her cognitive schema in order to make (create?) sense of this text, she is also in the process of having to create new categories and hierarchies and revise or discard old ones.

Thus it is that, in a very real sense, readers (re)write the text they read. Reading and writing are a single process (Derrida).

Which brings us, then, to the writer who originally created the meaning that appears to reside in the text but clearly resides (also, primarily, only) in the reader. The meaning of the text, from the writer's point of view, comes from the writer who put it there. Perhaps, then, writers use their language abilities to encode meaning through the use of signs called letters--but letters don't contain meaning. One might immediately argue that words do, however, have meaning, but this doesn't work either because words have enormously varied meanings (define the word by, or table). Well then (remember Alice and Humpty), sentences have meaning! But what does it mean if I write, "He went fishing"? For a fish? for a clue, for his identity? Or do I simply mean that "he's out to lunch," or taking a nap, or playing hookey, or that he's schizophrenic. Ah (you say?) it's in the context. But whose context? The writer's context; the text's context (?); an historical context; the reader's context? The context of the author's purpose (or of the reader's purpose)? But contexts are boundless (Culler). We really aren't getting anywhere. Curiouser and curiouser.

Again, at least momentarily bracketing Humpty and the White Rabbit, and forgetting the impossibility of meaning, (off with all their ugly heads)--let us "simply" agree that the writer is facing the difficult task of using language to create a text within a (boundless) context that will best meet with the non-visual information or theory of the world in the head or cognitive schemata of a group of readers she doesn't even know based on the (hypothetical) underlying rule-structure of language and her past experiences within the culture as they generate some generalized notion of "readers"? (see Fish, Iser)

At the same time, keep in mind that writers are always readers, reading and re-reading the text they create in order that their reading of what it is they are writing will generate more ideas. That is, as the writer reads what she has written, she is subject to all the creative possibilities of language discussed above: literally changing in the act of writing, the writer is no longer the one who produced the last sentence, but is instead the one who is now reading that which was not in language before, that which she had never before read (Perl). In so doing, she is creating new meanings which in turn, have the possibility of generating further creations of meaning that she may then write which will then . . . . Recognize the problem generated by Language as a genuinely creative possibility, but a creative process that never stops (cannot stop or be stopped). Note that stability and structure cease to exist in a continually changing system: in the moment of knowing, a moment that can only exist in an irretrievable past or a not yet arrived at future, we begin again the process of knowing. And though the mad spiral reasserts itself, it also suggests that the only sensible action within such madness is to engage the process of meaning-making fully.

But no matter how one deals with the spiral or the various acts of faith that it takes to bracket the spiral and affirm the possibility of meaning in and through language, a sensible reader (whoever or whatever exactly that is, though I am certain I am one) might at this point be wondering what all or any of this has to do with teaching someone to read or teaching texts (reading and writing of) to learners at any level. Or to put it more bluntly: what does all this crazy theorizing have to do with the real world (however, exactly, one defines it)? (Nelson Goodman)

At the very least, the theoretical meanderings above suggest that much of what goes on in schools (and elsewhere) has very little meaning for anyone, regardless of where one places the origin and/or possibility of meaning. But rather than developing a full-blown argument attacking what goes on in many (not all) classrooms (including English classrooms), a few anecdotes might suffice. An intelligent, highly articulate, witty, high-school junior was overheard to say the following to his friend, and equally intelligent sophomore who wanted to know what the PSAT's were "really like":

Sophomore : "How did you do on the English?"

Junior: "You mean the Reading? Okay, I guess. You know, all they wanted was the answers. And the stuff they wanted you to read was like in school--so boring you just wanted to get it over with."

Perhaps the boredom is at least equally the fault of a lazy, recalcitrant, spoiled, middle-class kid. Probably not, but let us concede that part of the counterargument. The question is this. Who taught this kid that one reads in order to find answers? Who taught him that meaning resides entirely in the text and that reading is an operation one performs in order to find the correct answer which has already been supplied, though the "correct" answer is cleverly hidden among four or five other answers which are almost correct but contain "tricks" (Junior: "They put tricks in the questions to try to get you to make mistakes--you know what I mean?" Sophomore: "Yes, I know.")

It would never occur to this young man and the hundreds of thousands of other kids in our schools that they are responsible for meaning-making. It certainly did not occur to the college-bound groups of kids whose discussion of school reading and writing is accurately paraphrased as follows: we write because the teachers tells us to. We write what the teacher tells us to. We read in order to find out the answers. Usually the teacher has us write to see if we did the reading and know the answers [there are those answers again]. But mostly you don't much have to read because usually the teacher tells you the answers and that's all you really need to know anyway.

Over the past twenty years, I have been asking a broad variety of elementary, high school and college students and faculty about their past "school" experiences in general and about whatever they can remember about language-learning, reading and writing in particular. Although for many of these respondents the two processes of reading and writing share many simultaneous moments, and I strongly suspect that the two processes are a single process, for the present purpose and because the surface structures with which I am working demand linearity, I will discuss learning-to-read first, and then learning-to-write.

I asked people to write and talk about the following questions: what do you remember about learning to read? How far back can you remember? Who besides yourself was involved? How did you feel about it? What follow-up experiences do you remember (that is, once you could read, what did you read? were you asked-forced to read)? How do you presently feel about your reading abilities (are you a good or bad reader and what do you mean by good or bad)? What kinds of reading do you find difficult? What kinds do you most enjoy? Because these are open-ended questions and because the respondents have the opportunity to write personal essays in response, many choose to focus on one set of questions rather than another, but they normally try to address most of the questions to the best of their ability.

Almost all of these people remember being able to read before they went to school; easily 90% of them write this, and when the other 10% are asked to elaborate, they almost always point out that they just aren't sure, but the first "teaching" of reading they remember occurred when they arrived in school. Of this overwhelming majority who learned to read before they went to school, reading is associated with fond memories of sitting on a parent's or grandparent's or babysitter's lap, word-picture-alphabet books, fairytales, animal stories, etc. Many of them remember particular favorites. And the learning process is nearly always the same: a warm, safe atmosphere; exciting stories; and a growing sense of the fact that the funny, black marks on the page had something to do with the process. This is _particularly_ important because so many of the respondents fondly remember realizing the moment at which they discovered that the reader (parent, babysitter) was skipping part of the story because it was late and time to go to bed, or because the loving reader had gotten sick of _Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs_--they remember associating that which was skipped (pages and the marks on pages) as being part of the process--most importantly they remember realizing that those marks _meant_ something. After that, they remember very little (like oral-language learning). Some remember memorizing, word for word, certain favorite stories and "pretending" to read those stories back to their parents or whoever would listen, but as nearly as I can tell from their responses, they aren't really aware of when this movement changed from rehearsing whatever they had memorized to the moment at which they were genuinely interacting with the black marks on the page. I should also note that many of them clearly remember turning pages as they "read" what they had memorized, knowing that a given "memorized" part was on one page and not on another, so it is most difficult to decide whether this was "memorization" or reading. In the terms of current work in reading research, it is at least likely that they simply had a preponderance of non-visual information to bring to the text and they were, indeed, reading.

School changes things, and the middle- and high-school kids I talked to seemed oppressively aware of it.

When I asked these kids to write about their reading and writing experiences in school, they confirmed the sterility of the experience (they were also clear about the fact that they would not have written the information if they had had to put their names on the papers and/or if the papers had been funneled through one of their teachers because someone might find out what I said and that could get me in trouble"). It is unnecessary to reproduce the questionnaire here: suffice it to say that we were in a relaxed setting and I had asked them to write about why they read school assignments, what happened after they had read an assignments, what kinds of writing they were asked to do, what happened to the writing after they did it, and how they felt about the whole process.

Here is a sampling of their responses: "We read the story so that he could give us a test on it." "We took the test in order for her to make sure we had read the story." Or, most damning, we never read much of anything because the teacher always told us what we had to know and that was all, that was on the test so it was a waste of time to read the thing in the first place. Notice how clearly these responses suggest that in the students' terms, reading has a single purpose: to find out the answer that will be on the test. If the answer may be found in some other way, there is no reason to read. And continue to keep in mind that these are good students; these students have succeeded; these are the responses of students who are almost certainly going to college. Some of them hope to become teachers.

When asked what they "did" after reading something for school, they said, "we take a test on it." When I clarified by saying, "no, I mean before the test, and after the reading assignment, what kinds of writing activities or discussions do you engage in?" They looked at me funny and said, "we take a test on it." Being the intrepid interviewer, I pushed harder. "Surely you sometimes write essays about whatever it is you were assigned to read, don't you?" "Of course, was the reply, and I knew that I had them now. "Okay, that's what I want to hear about," I said, knowing that I was about to find out the contradictions and truth of the matter. And they said, "Yeah, well, like we said, sometimes instead of a test we write what the teacher tells us the thing means, and then later have a test on that. Is that what you mean?"

I remember one high school student in particular because he seemed to know how silly the whole thing was, and although I believe he found me and my questions somewhat humorous, he finally blurted out: "Why don't they ever ask us to write or say what we really think?" I said, "That's exactly what I'm trying to get you to do now, and you've really stayed pretty silent until this moment." To which he replied, "Why do you want to know; what are you going to do with all this?" Smart kid.

It is important to qualify the above by pointing out that students were always, in all of these discussions, able to point out teachers who were clearly different, who did conduct classroom discussions that were not simply adulterated Socratic exercises and who asked students to speak and write what they "really think."

Although some college students seem more articulate about the situation and appear to recognize the absurdity of it--"these guys don't care what we think; all you need to do is pscyhe-out the teacher and give him what he wants"; or, once you figure-out her system of testing, there's nothing to it."--they often seem to be as accepting of the entire endeavor as their younger counterparts--"Look, all I want to do is get out of here with a degree and make some big-bucks; my main goal in life is to be a yuppie.

In short, while educators debate student-centeredness and experiential approaches to teaching, and literary critics and philosophers argue the sense and nonsense of deconstruction vs New Criticism, students are being told the meaning of Romeo and Juliet, memorizing it, and regurgitating it. And while some students are not as susceptible to such a system and work through meanings on their own, the simple fact remains that, for most students, reading is not a meaning-making" activity, an activity involving psychological and intellectual growth, or an activity engaged-in out of self interests. Rather, it is something one does in order to pass the test, if, indeed, one needs to do it to pass the test because, sometimes, all you need to know is what the teacher tells you about it to pass the test and then there's no reason to read it in the first place. Little wonder, then, that they are unable to 'think' critically about the texts we ask them to read or to synthesize information and create relationships across readings (Sharon Smith, 30).

At any rate, although I, too, wish to descry the present set of circumstances as described above, and I deeply empathize with the students who are being denied the opportunity to grow and learn through reading of all kinds and who feel they do not have an opportunity to say and write what they "really think," I am more deeply disturbed by what I believe is the by-product of a School system that runs in this machine-like manner, producing test-takers and answer-finders--a system that, perhaps, produces students who don't anymore know what they really think and aren't too sure how to go about finding out for themselves (Petrosky, 2).

And if my portrayal and the statements of these various people suggests that reading is in a bad way in the schools, writing remains in even deeper trouble (Applebee).

The simple fact is that johnny and jane can't write because they are seldom asked to write anything at all from elementary school through graduate school: they are too busy filling in blanks and taking multiple-choice tests. In fact, if a human being was dependent on us to teach speaking and listening the way, we teach reading and writing (and just about everything else), we'd be a nation of deaf mutes (Applebee).

Just as I have asked a broad range of people about their reading experiences, I have also asked them about their writing experiences. It comes as little surprise that they are similar, the major difference being that most of them remember almost no writing at all (with the exception of those who have graduate degrees, and they remember, primarily, their theses and dissertations). And again, when they do remember writing, they remember it as an exercise, sort of like pumping academic iron in order to develop those writing muscles--something they did in order to show that they could do it rather than as an act of meaning-making and communicating. To a large extent, many of them view writing as something that English teachers "make you do because that's what English teachers do." And the overwhelming evidence is that many English teachers, at all levels, fit the description--when they make students write, they do so because it is good for them, and everyone should at least know how to write standard, correct English.

It is notable that, in the area of writing, everyone has much less to say than in the area of reading, and the reason is that they all do so much less writing in school. It is difficult to complain about something that you never have to do. What passes for writing, in School, are single-sentence responses in workbooks and filling in blanks on dittoed exercises (Applebee, Rose). Even more telling is the response I and many other teachers of composition get from our freshman writers when we ask them to write personal essays, detailing their own experience in a given area and explaining how and what that experience means to them. After years of teaching freshman writing courses, telling students in advance that I want them to speak their own truths in their own language, asking them to avoid sacrificing content to form, pleading with them to avoid the contentless formulaic language they have been studiously taught to write, they hand in their first set of essays pointing out in the best of "Engfish" (Macrorie) that "one should note that one's movement through the adolescent and difficult years of high school into the transformation of becoming a college freshman with both awe and excitement at all of the exciting stimulation that one anticipates. But I do not offer-up this sentence to evidence the stupidity of our students or so that it might decorate the wall in some central English-Department office for professors to chuckle at on their way past. This incomplete sentence (and many others like it) clearly indicates, to me at least, that we are running a costly apprentice-shop system bent on producing ill-literates to toil quietly at their appointed tasks. Or, as Bob Dylan sings in "Subterranean Homesick Blues," "Twenty years of schoolin' and they put you on the day-shift."

It is one thing to use gobbledygook in order, purposefully, to bilk the public or avoid responsibility: that is a willful misuse of language, socio-political, linguistic immorality--sometimes the language of those in power. But it is another thing when you do so because you have been taught to do so and believe that it is what the educated folks" do (because that means that the System is amoral and irresponsible, dedicated to eradicating the possibility of choice and the possibility of being through Language). Perhaps the problem is considerably more serious than those with punctuation fetishes first thought.

And what about educated adults? Over the past 7 years, I have had the opportunity to conduct a series of faculty-development workshops. These workshops, populated by college teachers across a broad variety of disciplines, are directed at assisting the participants in developing writing activities for students in their various courses. Of the many I have had the opportunity to work with, most profess to having had little interest in writing much of anything until some point in graduate school when they got the opportunity to develop their own ideas about an area of study they had chosen and were committed to.

It is striking to note the similarities in their experiences. For the most part, they remember being taught very little about writing; they generally have learned to write because they had to in order to attain their masters or doctorates and continue to advance professionally; they find writing difficult; many of them enjoy writing poetry and/or fiction (though they seem almost embarrassed to admit this); and they really had never given the topic much thought until they had to write the paper for the workshop. They have about as much good to say about their English teachers as most English teachers have to say about their past math teachers. Furthermore, they are generally dissatisfied with the kinds of writing they receive from their students, primarily because they they believe that the students find the act of school-writing to be an artificial, unimportant activity, a point clearly articulated by the Director of the Learning Center at SUC--Fredonia, Ms. Penelope Deakin, who wrote: "Generally speaking, students are emphatically not writing about something which interests them or on which they have anything to say. In fact, they never even seem to consider the possibility that anyone would be interested in what they have to say. They are, instead, engaged in a desperate struggle to produce an artifact which will meet with someone's approval. They are trying to guess the rules for the production of this work as though it were some strange, separate activity which is not connected with their own minds. . . . To Write A Paper has become some arcane ritual which has nothing to do with reality and certainly nothing to do with a passionate need to communicate the writer's own ideas to a reader.

But in Wonderland, arcane rituals rule the day. And in our schools, reading and writing sometimes appear to make as much sense as the rituals Alice experiences at the "Mad Tea Party" (Carroll, 54-61). As for meaning-making, and the use of language to assert and create being? "No room, no room." Just as language becomes nonsense for the inhabitants of Wonderland, so also in many schools where meaning resides in books. Curriculum Specialists (or someone, some indefinable THEY) tells you which books have the right information (or the best meanings?). Indeed, THEY even provide Teacher's Manuals in order to help identify the information (the 'best' meaning?) for the teachers (so no one has to read too much--except, one might suppose or at least hope, THEY). Quite obviously, meaning is not made, it is given; and the School is the place where that which is given is to be devoutly and dutifully received. Finally, of course, there is another THEY: this is the faceless/nameless group who create 'standardized tests' so each school (and most perversely, each student) might be measured"--only for "constructive purposes" of course; only "to improve" the educational "system."

In this world of pre-formulated curricula and standardized multiple-choice tests, teachers not only do not need to know anything about linguistic, literary, or learning theories, they really don't need to know much about anything at all. And neither, for that matter, do the students. In fact, all anyone really needs to know is which manual to buy in order to prepare for a given, national test. (So this is the real world?)

But what's to be done? I suggest several highly reactionary steps be taken. First, let us recognize that Language is at the center of the learning experience. But this does not simply suggest that students study about Language as defined by either pre- or descriptive rules or structures; it demands, instead, the languaging of the people, the language of the students and of the teachers who are with us now, the language of the readers and writers who have come before. It is Language as it has been used and is being used by those who are in the process of making meaning of themselves and the world in which they live. Having made that assertion, we must further recognize that those who teach it must know something about its complexity. At the very least, English teachers must come to understand and openly assert that Language is not primarily the study of punctuation, usage and grammar; it is not a collection of historical and biographical facts about literary works and authors; it is not a topic sentence followed by four related sentences nor an introductory paragraph followed by a three paragraph body and ending with a concluding paragraph; it is not the trivial(ized) knowledge that Hester's Scarlet Letter is a 'symbol' or that a Shakesperean tragedy can be reduced the paradigm of rising action, denoument, and falling action (which can also be drawn in the form of a pyramid on the blackboard). Though all of these may be discussed in language (indeed, at times some of these may be valuably studied), none is what language is, and none of us who genuinely care about Language can allow it to be trivialized as simply a conduit for information (Moffett).

Language is the House of Being in which we reside; it is our way of making meaning and of sharing the meanings we make. If we are not making meaning and sharing it, then we are not studying Language at all--we are simply trivializing it. To treat writing as anything other than a meaning making activity is to turn it into an "arcane ritual," a formulaic exercise of filling-in-the-blank, and to treat reading as anything other than a meaning-making activity is to turn it into practice for using dictionaries or phone-books and, perhaps, practice for taking reading tests wherein the major purpose is to identify some pre-determined answer to some pre-determined question on some pre-determined excerpt. (Perl)

This is not the time to throw out all the ideas that grew out of the Anglo-American Conference on the Teaching of English (Dixon) simply because the ideas were poorly implemented in some schools. Instead, it is the time to recognize the fact that much of the theoretical and empirical research of the past twenty years supports an emphasis on the personal-intellectual growth of the individual student. Rather than assert some narrow-minded program for "cultural literacy," based on a four to five thousand item list of names, dates, sayings, and words (Hirsch); rather than accept the anti-intellectual dictates of a William Bennett or a Pat Buchanan, who wants us not to teach kids to think for themselves but to teach them "to think correctly" (Crossfire, CNN, January 17, 1988); rather than sacrifice our students to a fragmented curriculum devoted to turning them into productive little producers who will fit well into some "management system"--rather than follow any of these agenda, we must take the risk of teaching them to be meaning makers-- readers, writers, speakers, and listeners who think, question, articulate and act.

If the "personal growth" curriculum of Dartmouth seems hopelessly outdated in the 1980's and 90's, it may say a great deal more about the changes that have occurred in the ways that we have decided to view human beings. While the Gross National Product is important, it can no longer be allowed to be more important than the personal-intellectual growth of those who produce it. And if education becomes primarily the servant of the economy, if literacy is determined by production rates, then the "products of education" will be gross indeed.

After such "high" language, one might reasonably ask what we are to do about the problem. I offer the following:

1. Stop submitting yourselves and your students to standardized tests that, aside from questionable validity, do nothing to advance the teaching-learning process but are instead misused to manipulate teachers and students. Create your own systems of evaluation!

2. Recognize that English teachers are powerless only insofar as they choose to be ignorant of the creative power of language, and this ignorance may result from an unwillingness to confront contemporary theories about language and learning.

3. Implement an English curriculum that focuses on the reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities of the students; reject preformulated materials that have little or nothing to do with the creative uses of language and/or the lives of your students.

4. Recognize multiple-choice tests, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and "skills" practice for the essentially anti-intellectual world of busy-work that they represent.

5. Remember that most of us got into this profession because we genuinely love language, literature, and teaching; reassert that joy in the classroom.

It's a short underdeveloped list, but that's because the last item, No. 6, is this: remember that you are professionals. Develop your own list! Good luck.

SOURCES

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10 MEAT AND POETRY

Bruce E. Miller

In his novel A Damsel in Distress P. G. Wodehouse succinctly puts the case against poetry. The beautiful and idealistic Lady Maud tries to move a low-minded little urchin to higher thought.

> "You wouldn't like to be a poet when you grow up?"
> Albert shook his golden head.
> "I want to be a butcher when I grow up, m'lady."
> "A butcher?"
> "Yus, m'lady. Butchers earn good money," he said, a light of enthusiasm in his blue eyes, for he was now on his favourite subject. "You've got to 'ave meat, yer see, m'lady. It ain't like poetry, m'lady, which no one wants." (p. 76)

So there it is. You've got to have meat, but you can do well enough without poetry.

Lady Maud never succeeds in persuading Albert out of his low estimate of poetry, so his teachers might just as well give up the argumentative approach to him. But for the sake of their own pedagogy they need to know why Albert should learn to read poetry even if Lady Maud's hope that he will someday write it is unrealistic. In a nutshell my own argument is that poetry expresses forms of sentience and that some of those forms help us to shape our minds to the real world. I use the word poetry to refer to literature generally, to all imaginative writing in which the load of implication is unusually heavy. Albert would not in the least object to this extension of terminology; he has no more use for Pride and Prejudice than he has for the sonnets of Shakespeare.

By sentience I mean any condition of the nervous system when it is conscious or tending towards consciousness. The word is a little unusual, and I wish that I could find a more common one, but all the familiar terms are misleading. The words "idea" and "thought," for instance, designate intellectual processes, and although sentience includes pure mentation, it also embraces perception. Emotion is still another part of sentience, and in between thought and emotion lie a great number of intermediate states that we call "attitudes," "inclinations," and "mind sets," which seem to take their places on a continuum from "thought" through "perception" to "emotion." And other products of sentience stand altogether apart from this continuum. When you look into a bright light and then immediately look away, what you "see" is neither a thought nor an emotion nor quite a perception; the life of our minds in the state of dream is still something else; and the information that our proprioceptors are continually sending us--a gurgle in the stomach, a sudden sense of falling when in fact we are securely lying down or seated, a taste in our mouths as of brass when we have not eaten anything--sometimes report real events but other times accord with no objective reality.

The forms of sentience are extremely various. They include thinking, feeling, willing, desiring, imagining, perceiving. All those actions subdivide innumerable times so that, for example, we have not just one thought but, over our lifetimes, a great many, and not just one feeling but a countless number, and so on with the other kinds of neural action. Each one of these separate acts has two aspects: a content (we always think or feel about something or wish for something or hear or taste something) and also a form (the feeling of abhorrence can take many different colorings: disgust, contempt, revulsion, dread, wariness, resentment, and even these words are umbrella terms covering, each one of them, a variety of more particular forms of disgust, contempt, etc., for which no words appear in the dictionary).

Illustration may clarify the distinction between content and form in any act of sentience. If you have driven a car in the country in the summer time you are familiar with the amorphous, very changeable shapes which certain objects will assume as you move towards them. What first looks like a piece of canvass lying on the road appears on nearer approach to be a pool of irridescent water and then, when you get close to it, becomes the tarmac heated by the sun's rays. The content of the experience is the hot smoking tarmac; the forms for apprehending the content are a loose cloth, water puddle, fumes. Here is an example from mathematics. One child sees the problem 3 + 2 and the problem 3 + 3 as representing entirely different mental forms that have to be separately memorized in order to get the right content: 3 + 2 = 5; 3 + 3 = 6. Another, luckier child has discovered that a common form underlies all problems in addition: 3 + 2 = (1 + 1 + 1) + (1 + 1) = 5; 3 + 3 = (1+ 1 + 1) + (1 + 1 + 1) = 6.

How do we acquire these forms of sentience which allow us to know the world through our senses, our minds, and our feelings? An old common sense view is that we get them from the world itself by means of experience: we see an orange, then another, and as a result we achieve an idea of oranges; we see a race track, a ring, and a wheel, and so we derive a concept of circularity. Our minds begin as empty tablets on which experience writes messages for as long as we live. Up to a point, this explanation seems reasonable enough. As Mark Twain said, if you want to know what it feels like to carry a cat by the tail there is no substitute for picking it up and actually carrying it by the tail. But not all forms of sentience can have been derived just from pure experience, for much experience is indecipherable before it is interpreted by those forms themselves. Long ago the

Gestalt psychologists showed through interesting demonstrations that a certain drawing will look like a profile of a face placed directly against an urn but that the two figures will reverse identities in our perception so that what was the face suddenly becomes the urn. Another demonstration was to draw two circles, the one inside the other, and then to ask the viewer whether the resulting figure was a solid cone advancing its tip or a hollow cone into which the viewer was looking. In this instance we see the one possibility just as readily as its opposite. More recently, the cognitive psychologists, extending the ideas of the Gestaltists, have developed a theory that each person's mental operations are governed by "schemata" (singular, "schema"), forms embedded in consciousness which that person uses to interpret events. So from this more recent point of view also the forms of sentience seem at times to precede an experience and to make it comprehensible. Finally, there are instances of new ideas which came before the realities which those ideas called into being. The Wright brothers' airplane is a spectacular example, and our own lives, closely examined, would almost certainly furnish other, homelier examples.

Literature in particular separates the content of sentience from its form because quite often even great literary works will feature perfectly commonplace content but develop it in highly elaborate ways. The practical advantage of this combination to readers of these works is that, having mastered a difficult form through a simple content, they can go on in their lives and apply that complex form to an appropriately difficult content. In this little poem by Thomas Hardy the content is the familiar notion that marriage and family life can be disappointing ("Marry in haste and repent at leisure").

John and Jane

I

He sees the world as a boisterous place
Where all things bear a laughing face,
And humorous scenes go hourly on,
Does John.

II

They find the world a pleasant place
Where all is ecstasy and grace,
Where a light has risen that cannot wane,
Do John and Jane.

III

They see as a palace their cottage-place,
Containing a pearl of the human race,
A hero, maybe, hereafter styled,
Do John and Jane with a baby-child.

IV

They rate the world as a gruesome place,
Where fair looks fade to a skull's
grimace,--
As a pilgrimage they would fain get
done--
Do John and Jane with their worthless
son.

The idea here is simple enough, but Hardy's way of putting it is engagingly intricate. Probably the most obvious peculiarity is that the last line of successive stanzas gets longer, but when we examine the structure closely we see that other kinds of accretion are also going on. The first three lines of each stanza are four-beaters, an English folk meter which uses four strong beats to a line and ignores the number of weak accents. The last line of Stanza One is a one-beater, of Stanza Two a two-beater, of Stanzas Three and Four four-beaters. Thus one kind of accretion is adding syllables to the last line of each stanza so that gradually it builds up to the same length as the regular lines. This growing length of the last lines points to another kind of accretion: each of these lines adds one item of substance. Stanza One's last line gives us only John; Two's gives us

John plus Jane; Three's gives John plus Jane plus a baby; and Four's adds more substance by having the baby grow up to adulthood. But even as the stanzas increase by attaining more syllables and a larger quantity of information, they decrease in their feeling-tone, from a high of great pleasure to a low of great displeasure. The predominant attitude in Stanza One is hilarity (*boisterous, laughing, humorous*); of Two it is delight (*pleasant, ecstasy grace, light*); of Three it is appreciation (*palace, pearl, hero*); of Four disgust (*gruesome, skull's grimace, pilgrimage*). Overall, the form in Hardy's "John and Jane" is a pattern of incremental decrement, of a building up to depletion, a determined and energetic running-down. This form of sentience is opposite to the form that makes 1 + 1 + 1 = 3, and it gives us another possibility for dealing with combinations.

What has all that complexity of form to do with the notion that marriages can go sour? Nothing. But after I had read "John and Jane" I came upon this difficult passage in Susanne Langer's *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, Volume II, which I was studying at the same time that I was reading Hardy. Langer has been exploring certain facts about the growth and expenditure of energy in organisms, their power of converting one kind of energy into another kind, their capacity to store up energy for release at a later time.

> The push to action comes from central sources, from the matrix, the organism as a whole, which is always doing all it can as energy is brought in or drawn in, bound in constantly self-restoring protoplasmic structures if its immediate expenditure is prevented (which is largely, and constantly, by action of the parasympathetic system), and meted out again in thousands of enacted impulses, whenever and wherever the ways are clear. (pp. 32-33)

In that complex passage, where I most need help, Hardy's form prepares me to comprehend Langer's content, allowing me to see that Langer proposes incremental decrement as the basic pattern in the lives of organisms, a constant interplay of multiple phases of building energy and storing and spending.

Probably we would not want to teach "John and Jane" to children or even to adolescents since their experience will not have prepared them to make very much of the content and therefore they will lack the easy entrance that adults have to the form of sentience expressed in this poem. But that objection does not apply to Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, for in this masterful hymn to charity young and old, low-brow, middle-brow, and high-brow all come together. A principal theme in the novel is the possibility of radical reformation of character, and the example of this reformation is Scrooge's change from misanthropy to benevolence. None of the film versions which we see on television does anything like justice to the subtlety with which Dickens makes that transformation seem plausible, and therefore where Dickens is both serious yet light-hearted, the dramatized versions lean either to somber preaching or to giggling parody. The consequence is that the forms projected in the novel, being highly refined and therefore new to us, may eventually work into our comprehension of our world or ourselves, whereas the films, imparting only the forms of sentience that we already possess, give merely a fleeting amusement.

The problem for Dickens is to make us believe that a hardened old cynic like Scrooge really can change, for in our ordinary frame of mind most of us do not think that anyone can actually will a radical alteration in character. This belief is expressed in the popular saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," and in the learned maxim, "Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior." Dickens solves the problem brilliantly in the central portion (which he calls "Stave

Three"), Scrooge's travels through London, the countryside, and even over the sea with the Ghost of Christmas Present. Inversion is the technique by which Dickens depicts Scrooge's growth into a new personality.

This inversion has two parts. One is the complete reversal in the leading traits of the ghost between the opening pages of the episode and the conclusion. Here is the scene which surprises Scrooge when he opens the door of his bedroom and enters his sitting room.

> It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove, from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull petrifaction of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped upon the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.
>
> ... It was clothed in one simple deep green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare, as

> if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls were long and free: free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

Dickens firmly accents all the main features which he wants us to mark. This "jolly Giant, glorious to see" is in the early prime of life, playful, and associated with an almost extravagant abundance of physical good things. His great size, his becoming and loosely draped robe, and his association with bright colors, mostly green and red, and with food in its perfected state emphasize his virile and almost voluptuous sexuality. But at the end of the chapter decay afflicts all this luxury, heartiness, and health. Gray hair and physical desiccation replace the Ghost's exuberant vitality, and his former virility is mocked by a grotesque femininity when he pulls from beneath his robe two starved and deformed children named Ignorance and Want. The joyfulness which he had infused into every scene, however desolate, is now turned to bitterness as he repeats, with redoubled rancor, Scrooge's own earlier sarcasm: "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?"

The other part of the inversion, complementing and completing the Ghost's deterioration, is Scrooge's psychological and moral rehabilitation. What the Ghost loses Scrooge gains so that over the course of the episode as the Ghost grows bitter and sad, Scrooge becomes outgoing and happy. The basic form of sentience in this section is the pattern of things-becoming-their-opposites as in the Chinese yin-yan figure, the classical Greek meander design, or the reversal between the portrait and the man in

Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray. The effect here is that Scrooge exchanges qualities with a spirit who vanishes, taking out of the world with him Scrooge's demerits. Normally we think of character change as substitution: Scrooge was stingy, but now he is generous. Since substitution is not easily attributed to personality, we disbelieve most indications of reform. In dealing with this subject Dickens invokes a different form of sentience--inversion, a turning inside out, a becoming opposite--and this pattern more easily accommodates a content of reformation. Scrooge, we understand when we look at him from this point of view, was not so much reversing as he was molting. Dickens' fable presents to us a form of sentience in which moral reformation becomes credible after all.

Hardy's "Dick and Jane" is a moderately difficult poem; the sentience which its form reveals will become apparent only to adult and near-adult readers, tenth or eleventh graders and up. Dickens' A Christmas Carol takes in a much wider span of readers, ranging perhaps from third or fourth graders on through the old. But even nursery rhymes, which are dedicated to the very young, illustrate quite as much as the less readily accessible works the projection of particular sentiences through artistic form. Michael Hague's beautiful Mother Goose can help children pass successfully through the early, pre-conceptual stages of mental development. Verses like "Pat-a-cake" and "Polly, Put the Kettle On," though they are made of words, are not verbal at all in effect. They do not communicate anything, but rather, like the baby's soft fabric balls, rattles, and bird and butterfly mobiles, they coax the child's attention outward to make the first observations of the world and to form the elementary distinction between self and other. "Polly, Put the Kettle On" intrigues the child with an irony which both strains and expands a young mind: the poem is an aural object, an invisible thing, and its alternation of slow and fast meters, though intricate, is regular and spells out for the child new sentiences of movement, speed, and time. "Rain, Rain, Go Away" is an early lesson in what the Piagetians call decentering, "Little Jumping Joan" and the zany but rigorously logical "Jack Sprat" in the conservation of objects. Other poems in the collection express indispensable sentiences which are nameless in Piaget or any other psychologist of childhood.

Now we must return to Albert, the confident exponent of the claims of meat over poetry. In Belpher Castle, the seat of the Earl of Marshmoreton, Albert occupies a low position. Although Lady Maud romantically styles him a page, he is in fact an underfootman, an errand-boy who has to do whatever he is told by anyone else in the castle. As we would guess from his considered opinion about meat and poetry, Albert is both thoughtful, or at least scheming, and ambitious. He will not remain a flunkey long if he can help it; he plans to rise in the world. His project of self-advancement just now is to get up a pool of bets among the servants on the question whom will Lady Maud marry. They all pay money to buy a ticket on the one candidate or the other, the field of suitors by now having narrowed down to just two. A wise child in the ways of love, Albert has shrewdly guessed the lucky man and has also settled on a plan to help that man capture Lady Maud instead of the man whom the other servants ignorantly suppose to be the sure winner. So it's Albert against all the others with a good deal of money at stake, and Albert comes within a hair's breadth of taking it. But enter Keggs the butler. For a short while Keggs is fooled, and he puts in his money along with the others who bet on the wrong man. But Keggs soon perceives his mistake. Immediately he plots to make Albert give up his ticket on the right man and take Keggs's worthless ticket on the loser. Albert resists bravely but vainly. In a Machiavellian game he is no match with Keggs. In connection with the celebration of an important birthday in the noble family Keggs uses his authority as chief of servants to put Albert in a compromising position. Albert must give up his winning ticket to Keggs or else be discharged and lose all hope of being eventually advanced to the honorable post of butcher in the village of Belpher. At the end of the affair, in an avuncular mood, Keggs gives "blighted young Albert" as he likes to call him this advice.

> "What's been the result and what I might call the upshot," said Keggs, continuing his homily, "of all your making yourself so busy and thrusting of yourself forward and meddling in the affairs of your elders and betters? The upshot and issue of it 'as been that you are out five shillings and nothing to show for it. Five shillings what you might have spent on some good book and improved your mind! And goodness knows it needs all the improving it can get, for of all the worthless, idle little messers it's been my misfortune to have dealings with, you are the champion." (p. 169)

I agree with Keggs that "some good book" might improve the mind of "blighted young Albert," but I think the improvement would be of a different sort from the kind to which, sarcastically perhaps, Keggs alludes. Given Albert's character, he will not be open to didactic, deliberately uplifting writing, however wise and virtuous its teachings. But what can much more probably happen is that his mind will be improved in a different, indirect way. If he just attends closely enough, he will certainly find in poems and stories presentations of new forms of sentience, new ways of noticing, thinking, and feeling, and these in turn can lead him to see new ways of dealing with Belpher village, Belpher Castle, and even with the wily Keggs.

What can Albert's teachers do to help him to attend as closely as he must in order to attain the new sentiences? Mainly, I think, what they are already doing. They can continue to look for poems and stories that are likely to interest Albert, and they can go on developing preparatory activities that will stimulate him. Through deft questioning and interesting projects and audio-visual aids they can encourage him to respond overtly and to compare his reactions with other readers' responses. As they always have done, teachers can point out salient features in the works which Albert and his classmates do not notice.

Beyond these familiar teaching strategies there remains a relatively untried one which I believe that English teachers at all levels ought to use. It is the careful examination of the structures of the works they teach. I do not at all have in mind the study of prosody--metrics, stanza forms, even figures of speech. Although that technical material is invaluable for literary specialists, the writers themselves and scholars and critics, it does not help the general reader much. I mean instead the close scrutiny of the separate, highly distinctive patterns which mark each fine work and make it unlike any other, scrutiny of the sort we tried to practice in dealing with Hardy's poem and Dickens' novel. The structures operating within a work are forms of particular sentiences, and once readers discern those structures, the sentiences will join and amplify the readers' range of perceptual receptivity, emotional readiness, and mental acuity. Albert, in other words, will acquire some powers that may put him on an equal footing with Keggs himself.

Two objections might arise to encouraging young readers to study closely the structures of poems and stories. One is that they will soon tire of such minute inspection. But on the other hand, nit-picking is either boring or not depending on which nit you pick. Albert might pay close attention to the dissection of a watch in order to find out what makes it run, and he would certainly give rapt study to the intricate chicaneries of Keggs to see what makes them succeed. It is much the same with poems and stories. What makes them work is as interesting a subject as what they say about the world. The other objection to close study of literary texts is that no two people see them in the same way. In the last fifteen years the investigations of researchers in response to literature have lent support to the view that readers of the same literary work make widely different interpretations of it. On reflection, however, this finding should not surprise us. After all, even though the framers of the United States Constitution took pains to be clear, still people differ as heatedly over its interpretation as they disagree about the meaning of Keats's odes or Henry James's short stories. So far, the study of response to literature has mainly examined the content of the sentiences which readers derive from literary works, not the form, and content may well be the less stable of the two. But, coming back to Albert, what does it matter whether or not his perception of the form of a sentience is identical with Tom's, Dick's, or Mary's? The important thing is that it should be new to him, a form of sentience that he does not already possess. Literary works do quite enough if they induce new forms of attending, willing, thinking, and feeling.

Bibliographic Note

For my ideas about sentience and its expression in art I am indebted to the writings to Susanne K. Langer. Mrs. Langer's main works dealing with sentience (which she calls feeling) are: Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970 [originally published 1942]); Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., [originally published 1953]); Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling, 3 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1967-1982). Certainly these books are not easy reading, but they are richly suggestive concerning the relation of literature and the other arts to education. Mrs. Langer herself distills much of her aesthetic thought in a gathering of lectures called Problems of Art (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957).

Michael Hague's fine illustrations accompany Mother Goose (New York: Holt, Winston and Rinehart, 1984). The edition of P. G. Wodehouse's A Damsel in Distress referred to in this paper is London: Herbert Jenkins, 1956.

11 THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF READING IN THE NEW CRITICISM: THE NATURE OF THE READER/TEXT RELATIONSHIP

William J. Spurlin

For many literary scholars, critics, and theorists, the New Criticism is often cast aside as "traditional," as formalistic and explicative in aim and as atomistic in method, as its contention that meaning is self-contained in the text allegedly fails to account for any social, historical, political, or existential contextualization, either in its production or its reception. Indeed, in light of recent theoretical developments in reading, one may not ignore the reflective and compelling arguments of contemporary feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, and reader-oriented theorists which have brought forward a recognition of a context for reading and its contributing role in any realization of meaning on the part of the reader. However, the New Critics were not completely indifferent to the reader's existential context, and though more current schools of thought are to be credited with expanding on issues the New Critics either took for granted or addressed along fragmentary lines, one must also acknowledge that the New Criticism has often been treated as a scapegoat, as a means for such schools to platform their own critical and epistemological assumptions, resulting in their over-simplification of the New Critical concern for textual autonomy (which frees the text from its history and the process of its production, but does not necessarily obscure any relation between text and reader), and in their dismissal of the New Criticism simply because it seems traditional in light of new developments that have occurred further along in time.

Moreover, not only has the New Criticism been misjudged conceptually in research, it has also been misapplied in classroom practice, often resulting in routinized, dogmatic, and unreflective text-centered methodologies for the teaching of literature that do not account for the reader's active role in the shaping of literary meaning. In their own historical context, the New Critics, most of whom were devout teachers of literature themselves, were genuinely concerned for the aims and purposes of literary education in a period which confronted English faculties to meet the demands of increased student enrollments on college campuses, particularly after World War II, and the need that consequently arose for a more diversified curriculum that would account for a shift away from specialized textual analysis, evident in positivistic research in the field since the turn of the century, toward a method that would place the student face-to-face with the literary work so that it could be read and appreciated in itself as opposed to the external standards imposed upon it by the empirically-oriented researcher. The New Critics were mainly responsible for this revolutionary shift of focus, and embodied in their enterprise that addresses the aesthetic nature of literary works, there is, I believe, a systematic theory of reading that accounts for the reader's interactive and collaborative relation with the text in the production of literary meaning. This in turn raises for debate the validity of current fashionable accusations that the New Criticism is concerned solely with the internal features of the text without regard for the dialectical nature of the act of reading.

Furthermore, it is erroneous to assume that the paradigms of reading, as we currently understand them, remain exclusively under the auspices of any specific contemporary school of thought, particularly reader response theory, and that any single theory of reading within these schools is of most value pedagogically, for the New Criticism has made a significant contribution to our current understanding of reading and still raises significant educational implications. With this in mind, I shall attempt to describe the process of close reading as evident in the major writings of the New Critics, discuss what it implies generally of reading and readers, and conclude by critically evaluating this theory of reading pedagogically.

A significant place to begin, as it is a feature of the New Criticism: that is a crucial source of misunderstanding, is what W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley have identified as the affective fallacy. Wimsatt and Beardsley define this as the confusion between the psychological effects of a poem and the poem itself; a confusion between what the poem: is and what it does, so that the poem itself as an object of critical judgment tends to disappear.[1] The danger that Wimsatt and Beardsley recognized, as did other New Critics, was that personal associations evoked in reading could carry the reader outside the text so that he or she would be responding instead to a psychological state of mind as opposed to the text.[2]

However, it is simplistic to conclude that the New Critics postulate the complete disassociation of feelings and memories from the texts one reads. Not only is such an assumption reductive, it is also an act of denial of our own humanity and the nature of a work of art. Although I.A. Richards, the major forerunner of the New Criticism in England and in the United States, points out in Principles of Literary Criticism that a poem must be preserved from personal contamination and from irruptions of personal particulars in order to have an experience with a text that is indeed literary, he clarifies at the same time that poetic experience cannot be separated from life, and that readers cannot be expected to wear blinkers or to shut any part of themselves from participation.[3] In Practical Criticism, he mentions that the feelings and memories of the reader cannot be hastily dismissed as personal intrusions, but must be ordered by the text and brought into meaningful relation with other things in it.[4] Along similar lines, T.S. Eliot remarks in his collection of essays on poetry and criticism, The Sacred Wood, that the relevant emotions in reading are those immediately provoked by the text.[5]

These early New Critics were aware, then, that readers could carry personal associations too far by allowing these to wander off into a development of their own; but it does not follow that readers are not to respond to a text subjectively. In order not to lose sight of the text, the New Critics are saying that readers must learn to discipline personal idiosyncrasies so that their relationship will remain with the text alone. In this light, any locus of meaning would not remain solely in the internal features of the text, nor would it be situated exclusively in the reader's own subjective experience, but in the interactive and collaborative structures of exchange between text and reader.

With this clarification of the affective fallacy in mind, what does it mean to read closely according to the New Criticism? Richards in Practical Criticism says that for a reader to step back too far from a text, to pay little attention to its actual detail, and to allow thoughts and feelings to wander off into a development all their own is mistaken as a reading method; that the closest scrutiny of details is always compatible with the fullest and most discriminating appraisal of the whole.[6] What I believe Richards means is that without a close scrutiny of details, readers may be lead to conjecture where their thoughts and feelings could possibly develop independently of the text. Readers must constantly go back to the text and study its details as interpretation, and ultimately literary meaning, are shaped by the reader confronting the text. "The sovereign formula in all reading," says Richards, "is that we pass to judgment of details from judgment of the whole."[7]

Cleanth Brooks posits a similar theory of close reading in his well-acclaimed work The Well Wrought Urn. In his view, reading is the closest possible examination of what the poem says as a poem.[8] As with Richards, this involves proceeding from the whole to the parts, for such a focus establishes a framework. If we are reading well, Brooks feels, we allow our various interests to become subordinate to the total experience; otherwise, certain statements in the text, whether implicit or explicit, can wrench free of the context and demand to be judged on ethical, religious, or other grounds. Thus, close reading would ensure that any item in a text be judged only in relation to the total effect of the text and not in isolation from the whole.[9]

Both Richards and Brooks propose close reading as a means for readers to remain focused on the text, and for both this means an initial focus on the text as a whole followed by a focus on the details. For Richards, readers focus on details to prevent them from too hastily making generalizations and then losing sight of the text; and in Brooks, an initial focus on the whole text establishes a context, however tentative, which prevents subsequent details from being judged separately from the rest of the text.

The view of reading presented thus far seems highly prescriptive, one that can logically be derived from the affective fallacy. But this is not the complete picture, for close reading has yet another dimension, not one that is merely a corrective to misreading; for the New Critics did not believe that close reading involved only the scrutiny of the text holistically and then by details in order to ascertain what the text states referentially, as this would create a false distinction between the abstract argument of a text and its sensuous detail and would make the text reducible to a paraphrase or commentary. The crucial question to ask is whether the concrete details serve only to qualify the universal concept in the text.

W.K. Wimsatt points out in "The Concrete Universal", a paradoxical title in itself, that a poem embodies a complex and abstract universal, or concept, and an equally complex and concrete form, and that these two mutually qualify each other so that a literary work of art is both concrete and universal; so that complexity of form is sophistication of content.[10] John Crowe Ransom, in a similarly titled essay, disagrees with Wimsatt's notion that the concrete is supposed to be assimilated wholly to the universal or logical plan of the poem, and that the universal is to extend over the whole concretion. He feels that in all poems there is an intellectual, affective, and rhythmical language and that we attend to each of these in the composite language of the text though in different degrees of consciousness in our reading; though if we attend too carefully to the intellectual language, which contains the abstract concept of the poem, he feels we miss its import, because it is not only the concept itself that is central to the poem, but its instance in concrete action.[11]

What I see in common to these two arguments, however, is that the concrete details of a poem do more than merely develop the abstract concept, but embody that concept in concrete form, as Wimsatt does qualify that "the poetic character of details consists not in what they say directly and explicitly, but in what by their arrangement they show implicitly."[12] The total meaning of a text is not in the truth or falsity of the idea it incorporates, but as Brooks notes, in its character as drama--its coherence, its sensitivity its depth, and its richness.[13] Therefore, literary experience, according to these critics, does not merely lie in the reader's apprehension of the abstract idea in the text embodied in its language, which evokes an array of possible meanings in the reader and mobilizes relevant feelings, images, and memories in an effort to interpret these meanings within the context of the text so that the abstract idea, the meaning immanent within the work, can be grasped; but also in the reader's awareness that the language of the text in all of its detail is inciting this active participation, that his or her confrontation and interaction with the text is an event, the unfolding of a drama--a structure and a meaning that is beyond mere referential description.

A final word about the process of close reading in general before addressing what it more specifically implies of readers, is that it involves time and sustained effort. William Empson, a student of Richards' and author of The Seven Types of Ambiguity, points out that in the preliminary stages of reading texts, the words are not given their due weight, and although readers may have a broad impression as to the meaning, there are various incidental impressions wandering about in the mind.[14] This implies the need for several readings of a text. Richards states, after the analysis of the protocols in Practical Criticism, that making up one's mind about a poem is the most delicate of all possible undertakings; and that although readers may find themselves unable to respond in a coherent fashion, they pretend that they can always respond when a poem is put in their hands even when they cannot possibly be actively engaged in a text under such hurried conditions of reading.[15] Although such ideas may seem obvious, time and the opportunity for several readings is not something teachers afford their students in the classroom. Close reading implies prolonged and concentrated effort and more than one reading of a text; yet the compulsion of teachers to cover curriculum or syllabuses at both the secondary and college levels, as well as teaching and testing methods that aim at efficiency and expediency, seldom allow for this.

As close reading for the New Critics does not imply a unitary or self contained meaning in texts, the role of the reader is similarly not one of explicator of such a meaning. But what does close reading, as the New Critics describe it, more specifically imply of the reader?

I believe that it assumes the validation of the reader's subjective experience in confronting a text and working out its meaning, as well as a divergence of reading methods and interpretations of a text among readers. Earlier I noted, when discussing the affective fallacy, that it would be reductive to assume that the New Critics felt that readers totally sever their feelings and memories from the text, but rather they warn that a reader's indulgence in such would lead to a relationship between the reader and his or her own subjective experience and not the text. But the critical point that must be made is that the affective fallacy does not totally preclude the subjective and personal experience of the reader. The text incites the reader to respond, but as a whole person. T.S. Eliot argues in his Selected Essays that we simply cannot take our reading for entertainment or aesthetic pleasure and put aside our other convictions, such as religious or moral ones aside; that writers, through their texts, affect as wholly as human beings whether they know it or not.[16] Along similar lines, Brooks points out that readers are not asked to give up their own meanings or beliefs, or put to sleep all of their interests as human beings, but to allow their various interests to become subordinate to the total reading experience.[17] The process of close reading just examined implies the experience of the reader, including his or her subjective being, as valid in shaping literary meaning; and it is here in Eliot and Brooks that we have a more direct affirmation of this, with the stipulation in Brooks that whatever is evoked in readers be subordinated to the total experience formed and guided by the text.

This is also acknowledged by Wimsatt and Beardsley, though they are the most distrustful of the feelings of the reader insofar as these may develop independent of the text, as they point out that whatever emotions are induced by the poem, a more specific account of those emotions is needed to account for the reasons for them, which should be the poem itself; and that such an account will be a reliable index as to what the poem may induce in other readers.[18] Such a view may arouse suspicion as to a standardization of responses among readers, which is not a fundamental belief of the New Criticism, but represents more accurately, I believe, Wimsatt and Beardsley's concern that whatever feelings a text incites in readers, these develop under the totality of the experience being formed in the reader's encounter with the text, which is, as we have seen, a more accurate version of the theory of reading the New Critics postulate.

The New Critics' theory of close reading further implies a divergence of reading methods of the same text as opposed to a singular method of reading and interpretation. The New Critics also acknowledged not only what texts do to readers, but what readers do to texts. This is evidenced by the fact that the New Critics did attempt to describe to some extent the strategies readers use in finding meaning in texts, which has been developed further by more contemporary schools of thought, particularly reader-oriented criticism. Such descriptions are most clearly seen in Empson who discusses the strategies readers use when they confront an ambiguity in a text. For example, in the following excerpt from Shakespeare, "All bond and privilege of Nature breake" (Cor.,V.iii.25), Empson points out that "bond" and "privilege" represent, in effect, a single word, but contain two opposite notions. He feels that readers must find the highest common factor by opening their minds to all the possible associations of such paradoxes, which allows them to adopt a poetical attitude to words.[19] Empson later states that in apprehending ambiguities in texts, readers make separate and faint judgments in trying to interpret them, and that they are ready with alternatives to take the place of these if necessary; although readers are finally aware only of the one final association of meanings which seems to resolve the problem, and only secondarily aware of their active involvement in the process of finding and using these alternatives.[20]

In discussing close reading earlier, I mentioned Ransom's belief that in all poems there is an intellectual, affective, and rhythmical language and that we attend to each of these in the composite language though with different degrees of consciousness. Although at the time I was comparing his concept of the concrete universal with that of Wimsatt's, I would now like to add that Ransom says that in attending to the poem's different languages, readers have a right to choose which of the languages they like best.[21] The point is that a reader's focus on a particular "language" of a poem is guided strategically in an effort to interpret; Ransom later mentions, as an example of this, how a certain poem may incite a reader to paraphrase it because of its difficulty, thus translating its composite language into the exclusive language of the intellect.[22] But such a focus is not necessary in reading, but motivated by the needs of the individual reader. What is normally not attributed to the New Critics is their tolerance of different reading styles, which may inevitably lead to divergent interpretations of texts.

Richards notes in Principles of Literary Criticism that the actual experiences that even good critics undergo in reading the same poem differ widely as the experiences of readers in connection with particular poems are rarely singular. Although Richards feels this is unavoidable, he points out that what readers must eventually agree upon is the value of the poem.[23] He later gives an example of this by pointing out that readers may vary in their interpretations of Hamlet, but that these different interpretations would still place a high value on the play as a tragedy.[24]

But in Practical Criticism, the later work, he sees to withdraw this contention:

> It is the quality of the reading that we give them [poetic texts] that matters, not the correctness with which we classify them.

> For it is quite possible to like the "wrong" poems and dislike the "right" ones for reasons which are excellent.[25]

It seems that Richards is saying that even if readers reach different interpretations, yet are still concerned with some degree of "correctness", such as the value of the text, this leads them towards what they perceive as the correct response as opposed to the quality of the reading experience itself which in the end, is self-defeating. Such a concern for standard interpretation and response is more prominent in pedagogy than it is in New Criticism, and such a preoccupation takes the reader beyond his or her lived through experience with the text, to the more socially-oriented concerns of correct judgment and taste.

It is precisely concerning the notion of literary taste that I would like to direct my concluding remarks on the New Critics' theory of reading and all that it implies, for a tolerance of divergent reading methods cannot imply a uniformity of responses as to the worth of a text. Judging from my own analysis of the works of the New Critics, I would venture to say that they viewed the reading of literary texts as an intensely personal endeavor, an experience that is valued not in uniformity of method and interpretation, but in its quality. One of Richards' final conclusions in Practical Criticism is that we must allow for differences in opinion about poetry in order to avoid becoming undesirably standardized. In recognizing the difficulty involved in reading texts, he mentions that in order to avoid swimming blindly under the suggestion of fashion, on the one hand, or shrinking into paralysis before the complexity of the task at hand, on the other; the critical reading of texts involves the reader's power of choice, the lesson of criticism being that readers really have nothing else to rely upon in making their choices but themselves.[26] This calls into question our educational methods which are grossly self-defeating if they do not allow for such choices on the part of readers in deciding the worth of a text.

T.S. Eliot notes that reading is not valuable as a kind of hoarding or accumulation of knowledge giving the reader a "well-stocked mind."[27] In his introduction to The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism, he points out that literary taste develops gradually, beginning with an intense preoccupation with certain authors and types of poems that invade youthful consciousness sporadically for a time until about the age of twelve or fourteen.[28] In his Selected Essays, he mentions that these authors, after taking possession of us for a time, begin to affect each other in our mind and our own personality asserts itself giving each a place in some arrangement peculiar to ourself.[29] Gradually, our critical faculties awaken and we begin to grapple with poetry and realize that a poem or a text has an existence outside of ourselves, and instead of perceiving it as exclusively genuine or sham, we perceive degrees of greatness in texts. But Eliot concludes that the development of genuine taste is inseparable from the development of the personality and cannot be isolated from other interests and passions as it affects them and is affected by them, thus resulting in differences between what we like and what others like in literary works of art.[30] Although his description of the development of taste is somewhat sketchy, the important point Eliot is making is that taste cannot be acquired or taught as a skill in the classroom, nor can it be dictated, but develops gradually in readers individually and is continually shaped through personality development and sustained reading experience.

If the reading experience is to be regarded more as a measuring up to external standards of taste and less as a personal interaction with a text, then the very nature of the relationship between text and reader as described by the New Critics is threatened. Empson clearly points to the consequences; for if people feel their analysis of a text is always inadequate, this results in a lack of positive satisfaction in the reading of literary texts, and doubt becomes permanent in the background of the mind as to whether a text is being interpreted "properly" and as to whether a reader should allow himself to be pleased. For this reason, he feels that we need to protect ourselves against critical dogma.[31] Moreover, in the classroom, students need to be protected from such dogma, for if the quality of the student's experience with a text is undermined by a standard of correctness imposed and reinforced directly by teachers and indirectly by critics, the student gains only a false sense of the value of reading texts, which to him or her, has value only as an academic exercise instead of as a pursuit that is lifelong and meaningful in itself. Little did Empson and the other New Critics realize that some of their methods would be uncritically applied to pedagogy to ensure a standard of correctness and taste.

I have tried to show in this essay the presence of a relationship between text and reader in the major works of the New Critics; a relationship that is dialectical in nature, one in which the reader actively collaborates with the text in bringing about literary meaning; and have attempted to raise pertinent educational implications where appropriate. In doing so, I have also attempted to show that the New Critics' theory of "close reading" does not presuppose the subjugation of the reader under the authority of the text, reducing him or her to a passive listener, but that the text serves to guide literary experience, ensuring that the reader's relationship is ultimately with it alone, and that the experience which unfolds can safely be called "literary". The New Critics' formal examination and study of the text does not preclude the reader's active role.

In conclusion, how can the New Critics' theory of reading be evaluated in terms of pedagogical concerns? What I find the New Critics to leave largely unanswered is a distinction between the critic and the general reader. Is criticism as it is done academically and professionally an accurate guiding principle of the reading of texts? What are the educational implications of this? The New Critics' descriptions of reading do in fact rely too heavily on a presupposition of the reader's activity being congruent with that of the learned critic. Such a view is manifest in Richards' notion of a "competent reader", Wimsatt and Beardsley's "sufficiently informed reader", Ransom's "professional critic", and Eliot's "exceptional reader".[32] Furthermore, most of the subjects in Richards' study in Practical Criticism were preparing for the English Honours Degree at Cambridge; is such a sampling of possibly prospective critics and scholars indicative of reading generally? Such views of reading are not all-embracing, but ones that in fact narrow our conceptions of readers in a socio-cultural perspective and serve as a means for us to justify and prolong our role as critics in this restrictive sense. Is not the critic's reading of a text to a large extent for ulterior purposes--to evaluate a work according to literary standards, to teach, to enlighten others, to establish or perpetuate literary taste within a certain group or culture? Is this what we expect of our students? If it is, how do we account for Eliot's claim that taste develops individually and is shaped by the development of the personality and one's experience in reading texts? Does pedagogy account for this developmental process, or do teachers teach texts with a narrow notion of reading as academic and professional criticism? It seems to me that although the New Critics were concerned for the place of the reading of texts in the classroom and in correcting faulty literary education as pointed out at the beginning of this essay, their theory of reading does not make the distinction between criticism and aesthetic reading, but rather, assumes that in adequate literary education students read texts as critics.

Although the New Critics have liberated the text from the historical constraints of authorial production and intention, and have postulated its independent existence apart from historical change, what cannot be assumed is that the literary event remains unchanged when the conditions surrounding it do. The New Critics assume that the text and reader in themselves are sufficient to define the context of reading; but readers do not operate in a vacuum, indifferent to the social and political conditions surrounding them. What happens to literary meaning when the historical, social, political, and pragmatic conditions under which reading takes place change? How do the methods, strategies, and responses of readers under such changed conditions compare historically? These unanswered questions may lead us to query whether academic and professional criticism is paradigmatic of all reading experience.

Nonetheless, the New Critics did begin to propose possible strategies--and errors--readers use in reading and interpreting texts. Although their descriptions are by no means exhaustive, they have made a valuable contribution to our contemporary notions of the reading of texts through their development of a descriptive approach showing how a text opens itself to intercourse with readers.

Notes

[1] W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," in The Verbal Icon, eds. W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), p.21.

[2] This notion of the affective fallacy was a major concern of the New Critics, but given its name and most coherent treatment by Wimsatt and Beardsley. For further clarification, see John Crowe Ransom's essay "Criticism, Inc." in his The

World's Body (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), where he argues that we need to cite the nature of the object as opposed to its effect on the subject (p.342). Also, T.S. Eliot notes that the end of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all accidents of personal emotion are removed, so that we see the object as it really is and find a meaning. See T.S. Eliot, "The Perfect Critic, in his The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (London: Methuen, 1920), pp.14-15.

[3] I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1925), pp.78-80.

[4] I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929), p.227.

[5] T.S. Eliot, "The Perfect Critic," in his The Sacred Wood: Essay on Poetry and Criticism (London: Methuen, 1920), pp.12-13.

[6] Richards, Practical Criticism, p.38.

[7] Richards, Practical Criticism, pp.38-39.

[8] Cleanth Brooks, introduction, The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry, by Brooks (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1947), p.xi.

[9] Brooks, pp.253-54.

+[10] W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., "The Concrete Universal," in The Verbal Icon, eds. W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954, p.82.

[11] John Crowe Ransom, "The Concrete Universal, I," in Selected Essays of John Crowe Ransom, eds. Thomas Daniel Young and John Hindle (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984, pp.280-82.

[12] Wimsatt, "The Concrete Universal," p.77.

[13] Brooks, p.256.

[14] William Empson, The Seven Types of Ambiguity (New York: New Directions, 1947), p.240.

[15] Richards, Practical Criticism, pp.298-99.

[16] T.S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature," in his Selected Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960), pp.347-48.

[17] Brooks, pp.252-53.

[18] Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," p.34.

[19] Empson, pp.90-91. Similarly, Wimsatt views the nature of poetic language as supercharged with significance, as having a fullness of meaning, which readers discern in poetic appreciation. This also presupposes, in my view, a strategical act of cognition on the part of readers to consider the array of possibilities the words in the poetic context may evoke.

[20] Empson, pp.239-40.

[21] Ransom, "The Concrete Universal, I", p.282.

[22] Ransom, "The Concrete Universal, I", pp.282-83.

[23] Richards, Principles, p.115.

[24] Richards, Principles, p.209.

[25] Richards, Practical Criticism, p.327.

[26] Richards, Practical Criticism, pp.326-29.

[27] Eliot, "Religion and Literature," p.349.

[28] Eliot, introduction, The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism, pp.24-25.

[29] Eliot, "Religion and Literature", p.349.

[30] T.S. Eliot, introduction, The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England, by Eliot (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), pp.26-27. Emphasis mime.

[31] Empson, p.255.

[31] See Richards, Principles, p.10; Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy" p.34; Ransom, "Criticism, Inc.," pp.327-29; and Eliot, introduction, The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism, p.9.

12 ENHANCING AESTHETIC READING AND RESPONSE TO POETRY

Philip M. Anderson

Alan Purves suggests that there is no such thing as an unschooled response to literature (1979, 809). If students respond in pedestrian ways to a text, maybe it is because we teach them pedestrian ways to respond to literature. Aesthetic reading of poetry happens only when we teach it in an aesthetic context. Maybe our students fail to appreciate lyric poetry because we teach them to read poetry as if it were a fable or a driver's education manual.

A theory of reading for English teaching that addresses this problem is Louise Rosenblatt's notion of transactional reading (1938, 1978). The latest development of her theory (1978) posits the idea of "efferent" and "aesthetic" stances in reading. Efferent reading is reading primarily concerned with carrying information away from a text; aesthetic reading is concerned with the experience during the reading. The efferent stance is usually the desirable stance for expository text types and the aesthetic stance is the preferred approach to literary texts (see Probst, for a concise and lucid summary of Rosenblatt's ideas) .

One of Rosenblatt's main concerns about literature pedagogy is the implied demand for efferent reading of literary texts when teachers ask students to remember plot and analyze details for later reiteration on a test. This teaching problem has been difficult to address, since it seems sensible that students need to understand or comprehend a text before they can make a literary judgment about it.

As a result, teachers usually strive first for literal comprehension of the plot of a story, narrative poem, or novel, and sometimes the situation or conditions in a lyric poem. All English teachers want their students to develop a critical sense, an ability to make aesthetic judgments about literature. Unfortunately, most of us end up settling for comprehension of the plot and analysis of the characters, to which we append a preordained theme statement.

Comprehension and Consensus

Because the comprehension problem appears paramount, English teachers rarely consider how the aesthetic stance to reading literature can be enhanced if we do not focus on comprehension of the text before we begin discussion of its aesthetic qualities, and how, in some cases, aesthetic reading of a text can be enhanced if we do not focus on literal comprehension at all.

I am not suggesting that comprehension is an unimportant part of the literary experience, or that emphasis on literal comprehension cannot lead to an aesthetic reading experience. George Hillocks, Jr.'s research into the comprehension and interpretation of literature provides a method for teachers to lead students through literal and inferential levels of text comprehension, leading to the literary and aesthetic goals of articulating the "author's generalization" (the "theme") and a "structural generalization" (some statement about the construction of the literary work) (see also, Kahn, et. al.).

After all, one of the main pedagogical problems in literature instruction is getting all the students to arrive at a consensus interpretation of a literary work. A consensus interpretation is not appropriate for every reading experience, certainly, but an entire class reading a single work under the direction of the teacher usually emphasizes a consensus interpretation as the final instructional goal. In while class literary experiences, teachers teach toward a consensus generalization and test toward a consensus conclusion.

Because developing a consensus reading is such a difficult pedagogical task, we usually supply the consensus interpretation for the students after testing them on comprehension of the text. Unable to account for the failure of consensus, we cite the students' lack of reading ability, or prior literary training, while we emphasize the inherently efferent qualities of the reading experience by over-emphasis on comprehension, analysis and consensus. Sometimes we look for answers from developmental reading and use instructional strategies inappropriate to literary reading, strategies that are designed for efferent reading, such as SQ3R (Early 192-3).

Over the years, our experience as teachers, and much of the research on response to literature, suggests that students cannot arrive independently at a consensus response to a literary work. In the classroom, students frequently are inarticulate or mute when asked, "What's the author trying to say?" The comprehension and interpretation problem is especially acute in the teaching of non-narrative poetry. Most research in response to literature emphasizes the differences in students' written and oral responses to a literary works, as well (Beach 119-120). We conclude that individuated response is diverse and disparate, that students will not be able to "understand" the work without our help, and they do not have the skills to comprehend the work in the first place.

But, in addition to Rosenblatt's theoretical insights about the necessity of aesthetic reading experiences, there is some research in response to literature that shows students capable of consensus literary response, especially if we emphasize the aesthetic stance in reading. Furthermore, there are specific classroom activities that encourage aesthetic reading while meeting the demands of the classroom, and there are some well-known aesthetic approaches to literature study that are reinforced by the research.

Research in Response to Literature

There are two main approaches to research on response to literature. The first is the protocol analysis method used by I. A. Richards in Practical Criticism (1929), an approach to researching literary reading and interpretation which has guided most of the research in the field. Generally, the written or oral response protocols of readers are analyzed by researchers to determine various characteristics of the responders or the response. Protocol analysis research provides important insights into child and adolescent readers, and some of the most important and influential studies on literature study in schools (K - 12) have used the method (e.g., Applebee; Squire 1964).

The primary mode of literary response teachers use in classrooms, writing literary essays or personal responses to texts, is directed, reinforced, and influenced by protocol analysis research. Though research using protocol analysis does not focus on reading comprehension exclusively, its methodology of articulating response (combined with the school's emphasis on reading tests and reading research's emphasis on comprehension), focuses the teacher's attention on written or spoken reiteration, the "comprehension" of the literary work.

But, there is also a second type of research into literary response, which seeks to evaluate response before it is articulated. Research on unarticulated response, sometimes called "passive ability," does not rely on readers' written or spoken responses or recreations of the text, but attempts "to try to go beyond such descriptions and statements and try to get closer to the response itself" (Hansson 1985, 213, 217).

Unarticulated response, as a research topic and a teaching approach, has had its supporters over the years, including two important British contributors to the 1966 Dartmouth conference. In the Response to Literature (Squire 1968) volume from the conference, James Britton observes that, "A sense of literary form . . . may become articulate finding expression in comment and criticism, but equally it may not; and this, as pedants, we find very difficult to admit" (5). In the same collection, D. W. Harding addressed the issue of emphasis on written response as a teaching and research technique directly: ". . . overt response (verbal, etc.) may indicate very little of the inner response" (11). But, in general, unarticulated aesthetic response has been neglected both in the research and in the classroom.

Unarticulated response research uses several methods, all of which make good classroom teaching strategies: 1) Gunnar Hansson charted responses on a semantic differential scale; 2) Alan Purves asked participants to choose critical questions they would prefer to answer about a text; and 3) Allan Abbott and M. R. Trabue asked subjects to choose the best and worst versions among four altered versions of the same poem (one of them the original text).

The most important finding of the unarticulated response research is the idea of a "central tendency" in response to a particular text:

> Using the semantic differential with a variety of readers from all walks of life, [Hansson] showed that there was a central tendency in the response to a poem. Only when the readers began to articulate their responses did diversity enter, for then readers began to focus on different aspects of the poem, began to make critical statements (Purves 1979, 809).

Purves found "that each text is unique not simply in its meaning and emotion but in the critical perspective that it elicited from students, and this across a broad spectrum of cultures and educational systems" (Purves 1979, 810). Abbott and

Trabue's study found a similar "central tendency" with regard to student evaluative judgment in response to altered versions of poems.

I recently asked approximately 90 students at each of four grade levels (5, 7, 9, 11) to choose the best and worst versions of three lyric poems rewritten three different ways (a variation on Abbott & Trabue's study) and found a central tendency in the response as well. I have included some of the central tendency findings below in the discussion of classroom techniques.

Rosenblatt's aesthetic reading stance assumes a holistic approach to reading; the closest the teacher gets to the holistic, or aesthetic, response in the students' reading is the unarticulated one. The unarticulated response becomes not only a means to assessing the literary sensibility of our students, but a way of encouraging aesthetic reading.

Classroom Approaches to Aesthetic Response

The best way to begin emphasizing aesthetic response to poems is to present students with more than one version of the same poem. One technique uses two or more versions of a poem, one the original version, with other versions re-written by the teacher. Students can be asked to pick the best version, the worst version, the funniest version, the oldest (either text or author) version, the most sincere version, or any other quality written into the altered versions of the poem. They can even rank order versions.

Abbott and Trabue rewrote poems by altering rhyme (unrhyming the poems), meter (disturbing the rhythm), and tone (making one version more "sentimental") and asked respondents in grades five through graduate school to choose the best and worst versions among the three altered versions and the original. Abbott and Trabue decided not to report the findings for the worst versions, but reported a decided tendency toward the sentimental version as *best* in schools and lower grades in college, and the *original* version as *best* in the upper grades of college.

My study used similar categories, meter and rhyme alterations along with the original, but I used altered diction (changing the poetic diction to a more prosaic form) as my third text variable instead of the tone variable. Abbott and Trabue used "essential characteristics" as their criteria for altering the poems; I used "poetic convention." Abbott and Trabue substantially altered each version of the poems; I made as few changes as I could. Teachers using the technique in the classroom may use any criteria that are relevant to the needs of the lesson and the student.

In my study, grades 5, 7, and 9 students tended to choose the altered diction version as *best* for all three poems ("The Eagle," Tennyson; "We Never Know How High," Dickinson; "The Pasture," Frost, though there was some variation in response to this poem at grades five and seven) and the grade 11 students equally chose the original and the altered diction as *best*. The 5th and 7th graders picked the altered rhyme and meter versions almost equally as *worst* versions at each grade level, while the 9th and 11th graders picked the altered rhyme version as the *worst* (again, with some variation for "The Pasture").

One interesting finding in my study, especially in light of the criticisms of student response as idiosyncratic or inconsistent, was that 20 - 30% of respondents at each grade level chose the same *best* / *worst* combination of choices for two out of three poems. But, since the students' overall patterns of choices lacked consistency, it appears individual taste may be more developed at all grade levels than we normally assume and may even interfere with consensus in some instances.

I present the summary of findings from my study so other teachers can compare their results with mine if they wish. But, I also present the findings to suggest to those who have doubts about students' abilities to judge poetry, or abilities to reach consensus without the teacher leading them, that the students do indeed have aesthetic responses we do not recognize. Teachers using this technique find student choices almost exclusively text-centered and the discussions frequently quite complex, even if the students do not possess the technical vocabulary we wish they had.

One relatively sophisticated version of this technique uses different drafts or printed versions of a single poem produced by the poem's author (holographs and proof copies of poems abound in writing and literature textbooks these days). William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis," for example, exists in several evolving printed texts. There are corrupt early printings of Shakespeare that include various versions of famous speeches.

Another approach that emphasizes holistic response to poetry, but using only the original poem, is Ascher Rivlin's Poetry Unfolding. Rivlin's strategies present a total approach to poetry, including writing about poetry, but the central technique highlights patterns of words, phrases, stanzas, poetic devices, and even punctuation, leading the reader toward recognizing the structure of a poem before discussing or responding to the content. The teaching materials commercially available for this method include color-coded transparencies (highlighting various types of patterns) and audiotapes. Colored chalk and a blackboard work very well for any similar exercise.

Teachers wishing to include some comprehension instruction in aesthetic response to poetry can give students a poem disassembled into an alphabetized list of words and ask the students to make a poem from the list of words. This exercise works best if the poem has fewer than fifteen words. Longer poems can be presented as separate lists for each stanza. Teachers may also explore responses to gender differences by changing pronouns and names in a poem from one gender to the other and ask students to compare both versions of the poem (e.g., Susan Cory, rather than Richard Cory, in E. A. Robinson's poem).

Teachers who wish to structure student response, for emphasizing preferred types and categories of response, can use semantic differentials, or verbal scales. Some verbal scales are bipolar and some are unipolar. Hansson (1973), for example, asked readers to respond to poems on bipolar scales using descriptors such as tragic - happy, bitter - sweet, simple - complex, and vibrant - static in his research. Other research has used single pole scales, such as "0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Happy."

Whether teachers use "Hot - Lukewarm - Cold" or "Happy 1 2 3 4 5 Sad" (or any other format) makes little difference as long as the choices present related semantic categories and the students know what the scale is for. More than one scale can be used for most poems, and students may mark them at different points during the reading of a poem to chart any changes in their response.

In another technique, Purves (1981) provided a set of critical questions about a text and asked respondents to choose the ones they would like to ask about the text. The researcher or teacher looks for patterns in the types of questions students choose for insight into response to the poem. As mentioned above, Purves found that different types of texts provoked different types of responses.

In the classroom, teachers may find that questions they thought too difficult for the students will be the ones students choose as the most appropriate critical questions for the poem. This exercise can also help the teacher choose the most appropriate types of questions to ask about a text. And, after all, the first step in writing about literature is asking questions. Categories of questions provided to students can include: literal comprehension questions, inferential questions, structural questions, literary theory questions, poetic technique questions, historical and biographical questions, or personal preference questions.

Aesthetic Reading and the Written Response

To bridge the gap between the unarticulated response and articulating response to literature, there are several techniques that emphasize writing without sacrificing aesthetic response. Each technique emphasizes writing literary texts rather than expository texts in response to literature; i.e., using poetic discourse to respond to poems, rather than transactional discourse (see Britton, for a discussion of poetic and transactional discourse, and participant and spectator roles in writing). While it is certainly valid to write an expository text (transactional discourse) about a poem (poetic discourse), i.e., a persuasive essay or descriptive report about a poem, this situation means the students must first respond aesthetically to poetic discourse and then translate the response into transactional discourse.

As mentioned above, many classroom situations require an efferent stance on the part of the reader, especially if the student is to write a critical response. Students writing transactionally project an efferent stance for their audience, so they frequently get confused, or try to take a short cut, and assume the efferent stance for the initial reading of the poem. A situation that asks the student to interact with the text of the literary work or to write a literary piece in response avoids that pitfall.

Kenneth Koch's approach to teaching poetry to children revolves around students writing a poem in response to a poem. Like Rivlin's approach, Koch's is a complete approach including "comprehension" of a type, but its main feature is the writing of poetic discourse as a response to poetic discourse. Koch deemphasizes literal comprehension of the text in favor of an understanding of the "poetry idea," or dramatic situation in the poem, which then serves as the impetus and the structure for student poems.

A second approach using poetic discourse as the primary form of written response is sometimes called "dependent authorship" (Adams). Teachers remove lines from a poem and ask the students to supply their own replacement lines. The approach is usually recommended for use with prose, but it can be used judiciously with poetry. One way to begin is to make the poem into a "cloze test" by removing individual words at various intervals.

Conclusion

Howard Gardner's research on children suggests that production of metaphor precedes comprehension of metaphor on the developmental scale, and no additional cognitive development is necessary after ages 7 - 8 for artistic growth (166, 213). Even without Gardner's research we have good evidence from Koch's work that young children can respond in aesthetic ways to poems. If we can accept that metaphor production can proceed without comprehension, and that fourth graders can write poems about poems, then we can certainly accept the fact that literary response can proceed without articulated comprehension.

The prejudice against aesthetic reading in schools is daunting. Basal readers emphasize efferent reading; every subject but English emphasizes efferent reading, especially in textbook reading. Many times English teachers contribute to the problem by emphasizing reading comprehension and the efferent stance in literature study. In the end, the efferent / comprehension approach teaches students that they can never read aesthetically or respond to poetry because there is always something they do not understand, something beyond their "comprehension."

Poems are moments of aesthetic experience as well as a communications of thoughts and ideas. Aesthetic reading is holistic; form and content are considered simultaneously. When asking our students to respond to literature we need to design instructional situations which allow them to consider form as well as content, image and emotion as well as thought and intellect. Aesthetic reading usually happens in spite of the school environment; English language arts teachers have a responsibility to nurture an aesthetic environment and promote aesthetic forms of reading and thinking within it.

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13 KENNETH BURKE AND THE TEACHING OF DRAMA

John P. Harrington

The teaching of drama at all levels of education neatly and brutally exposes problems of literary interpretation as practiced in the classroom. The problems are both familiar and novel, or perhaps the familiar in novel forms, as the familiar may be when articulated by recent theoretical approaches to literature. As has been acknowledged for some time, drama is more problematic in the classroom than fiction or poetry. Drama is action, and often there's not much action in the classroom. As a matter of practical necessity, drama in the classroom frequently becomes fiction or poetry: it is introduced, discussed, interpreted, and written about in terms of verbal style, figurative language, literary symbol, literary character, and physical setting. Those are all matters of the principal text of fiction or poetry, but they are quite obviously matters of a partial text of drama, or a script for drama. Even at a time of classroom film and videotape, the action of drama is in practice commonly reduced to literary action. It may be practical to reduce drama to its similarities to fiction or poetry, and continuity may be of some value in when introducing students to literature, but there still is manifest loss in teaching drama as script or literary text.

A collateral problem, certainly an old problem in newer forms, is the sense of text brought to bear on drama once it has been reduced to literary text. Reader response theory, generally conceded as the dominant new influence on literary interpretation as practiced in the classroom, shifts the primary object of scrutiny from text to reader. From its beginnings in the work of Louise Rosenblatt, and in its more recent and more influential expositions by David Bleich and Norman Holland, reader response theory has revised formalist New Criticism by locating literary meaning in the perceptions of the reader instead of in the language of the text. The effect of such theory on the teaching of drama is compounded, of course, by the likelihood that the text was only partially present even before it was devaluated.

Reader response practice always runs a risk rather flamboyantly advertised in the title of Bleich's book, _Subjective Criticism_. It runs the risk of domesticating the text to a reader's prior knowledge, of construing reading as a confirmation of what one already thinks and knows. These are risks acknowledged by reader response theorists, especially Wolfgang Iser in _The Implied Reader_, by admission of the text as construct addressed to a reader and characterized by internal evidence located by formalist procedures. However, just those procedures once again reduce drama to its similarities to fiction or poetry. That reduction is especially apparent in pedagogical essays and textbooks centered on reader response statements, the technique derived from Bleich. For example, Kathleen McCormick's proposals for "focused" reader response statements in "Theory in the Reader: Bleich, Holland, and Beyond," are at least aware of "text-oriented ends" (836), but they fail to vary the terms of these assignments for texts by Shakespeare, Kafka, and Marvell. _Reading Texts_, a student guide by McCormick and others, also emphasizes response statements for all literary occasions at the expense of genre-specific problems.

The loss of the unique qualities of drama and the loss of the text in discovery of the reader are problems with counterparts in extra-literary debate over the epistemologies of humanism and social constructionism, a term roughly synonymous with that now derided term, cultural relativity. Treatment of literary qualities of drama instead of genre-specific characteristics and emphasis on reader reactions instead of textual peculiarities both pursue codes of similarity instead of codes of difference. This pursuit was the subject of a debate in broad ethical terms between Lionel Trilling and Clifford Geertz. Despite substantial and freely acknowledged doubts, Trilling, in "Why We Read Jane Austen," which was left unfinished at his death, maintained the humanist placement of "special value upon ranging backward in time to find in a past culture the paradigms by which our moral lives are put to test" (212). Geertz, whose previous counterstatements had been cited by Trilling, responded in Local Knowledge with only slightly qualified reiteration of his position that "the truth of the doctrine of cultural (or historical -- it is the same thing) relativism is that we can never apprehend another people's or another period's imagination neatly, as though it were our own . . . . we [apprehend it] not by looking behind the interfering glosses that connect us to it but through them" (44). Oddly enough, given its post-structural premises, reader response theory practices Trilling's and humanism's domination of the text by self and pursuit of similarities. Just as oddly, teachers of drama and literary theorists of reader response criticism generally ignore the opportunity offered by Geertz: the possibility of defining the enterprise through those interfering glosses that separate drama from fiction and poetry. It now seems likely that some collaboration between reader response and social construction will occur, but as yet that has proceeded no further than the shift of attention from freedom of subjectivism to the workings of interpretive communities in Is There a Text in This Class? by Stanley Fish.

One who delights in oddity may further delight in the brief appearance in this Trilling-Geertz debate of one unfashionable theorist who was unconcerned with the practical, pedagogical applications of his own seminal concepts to matters as trifling as the teaching of drama. Geertz, in an introductory essay to Local Knowledge that was written after his rebuttal to Trilling, alluded to Kenneth Burke as one "whose influence is, in the United States anyway, at once enormous and -- because almost no one actually uses his baroque vocabulary, with its reductions, ratios, and so on -- elusive" (27). There are many Burkes (that was the premise of an important essay on Burke by William Rueckert), but the Burke most useful here is the Burke of A Grammar of Motives, which was first published in 1945. Burke's comprehensive theories on forms of literary and extra-literary meanings, from A Grammar of Motives and other books, are duly but briefly adduced today by literary theorists, giving them, at this present time of proliferating literary theory, the pleasant character of being both old and new. The full implications of the "reductions, ratios, and so on" of A Grammar of Motives, self-described as "A book on Human Relations" (323), are elusive indeed. But by his own account Burke completed the first 200,000-word draft of this study when he arrived at a definition of Aristotelian simplicity that now appears in its entirety on its first page, a page that in itself could renew the teaching of drama in the classroom.

Burke's definition of his Pentad originated in drama, as A Grammar of Motives "began with a theory of comedy applied to a treatise on human relations" (xvii). The elements of Burke's Pentad are: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose. His aims are not pedagogical, but the derivation of his terms from drama encourage reapplication of them to a play in a classroom as a means to apprehension of a text by a reader.

> Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself. But be that as it may, any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it

> was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose). (xv, Burke's emphasis)

Very little further explanation is required. Act is identified by "any verb, no matter how specific or how general, that has connotations of consciousness or purpose" (14), and so it includes matters of inaction or failures to act. Scene includes environmental surroundings, social surroundings, historical or cultural context, and also situation of what came before and after, all drama's elaborations of setting. Agent includes single character in action and also characters in collaboration (co-agents) or in opposition (counter-agents). Agency includes means both quite specific, or instruments, and means more abstract, or instrumentality. Purpose, including both immediate and ultimate ends, is identifiable in itself and also inextricable from the previous four terms. For Burke, these terms comprise a grammar because they anatomize parts of action. The grammar is "dramatism," in Burke's word, because "it invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action" (xxii). The grammar restores drama in classroom practice because it restores action in drama. Though it may resemble the four W's of journalism, the Pentad is productive in the teaching of drama because it provokes extension of localized to generalized identifications of Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose. That extension is action in itself, and so these five terms are compatible with that dynamic relation of text and reader sought by reader response theory.

The clarity of Burke's terms and their usefulness on different levels of generalization makes them valuable in a number of classroom contexts, from secondary to college, and from poorly prepared to advanced placement students. The example of a single moment of action, the blinding of Gloucester in King Lear (III, vii), may suffice as demonstration of the potential of the simplest meanings of these terms. At their simplest, these terms open the text for students. At this moment of Lear Burke's terms offer: as act, punishment of a traitor; as scene, Gloucester's castle; as agent, Cornwall; as agency, mutilation of Gloucester's eyes; and as purpose, revenge ("The revenges we are bound to take"). Even at this level of identification the drama is treated as action, and as action the play is made accessible to students baffled by its language: the irony, for example, of this act taking place in Gloucester's own castle. At a slightly more generalized level of identification, Burke's terms offer students apprehension of Cornwall's act as one of law, despite his villainy; the situation of this scene between Lear's mock trial on the heath (III, vi) and banished Edgar's demonstration of fidelity (IV, i); the organization around Cornwall of co-agent (Regan) and counter agent (faithful servant); agent and co-agent's relish for the agency chosen over hanging; and Cornwall's purpose as an act of violence to preserve order followed by Gloucester's own vow of similar purpose ("winged vengeance"). From this level of identification logically follows greater generalization, or, in Burke's term, greater "circumference": "one may place the object of one's definition in contexts of varying scope" (77). So, too, follow connections between separate terms of this Pentad, or "ratios": those given attention first in A Grammar of Motives are Scene-Act and Scene- Agent.

In attention to principles of action, Kenneth Burke's terms, or Pentad, refocus attention, at a time of pedagogic absorption in reader response theory and response statements, on the text: or, as Geertz would say about other interactions, not "looking behind the interfering glosses that connect us to [a text] but through them." Burke certainly is prone to an emphasis on ambiguity, which may be construed as evasion, that was both fundamental to text-oriented formalism and provocation for reader-oriented theories of interpretation. Burke's admission that "what we want is not terms *that avoid ambiguity*, but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise*" (xviii, Burke's emphasis) certainly evoke the multiple dangers and omissions of rigorous close reading. These encourage, at worst, classes with texts, but no students. However, a sort of ambiguity between knowledge (reader) and provocation (text) is precisely the reaction sought by reader response theory. The dangers of reader response theory remain satisfaction with pursuit of similarities: conformity of self-defining specific response statements; emphasis on what students already know; and, in this case, reduction of drama to its literary similarities to fiction or poetry. These encourage, at worst, classes with students, but no texts.

This proposal of the use of Kenneth Burke's Pentad in the teaching of drama cannot serve as an introduction to the many implications of Burke's thought on human relations. But it does hope to serve as one argument for reintroduction into the classroom of that sense of difference so catalytic in the relation of text and reader: cultural or historical, in the sense of the issue for Geertz, and dramatic in the sense of the issue for the teacher of drama. As heuristic, Burke's Pentad offers a formula of dramatic text not oblivious to the reader. That is certain in the placement of ourselves and our students in the purpose of *A Grammar of Motives*: "By examining [these five terms] quizzically, we can range far; yet the terms are always there for us to reclaim, in their everyday simplicity, their almost miraculous easiness, thus enabling us constantly to begin afresh" (xvi).

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14 THE LITERARY KALEIDOSCOPE

Sabina Lask-Spinac

Looking into a work of literature is like looking into a kaleidoscope: One sees an endless array of reflected refractions bursting like fireworks in psychedelic brilliance; one pauses briefly to enjoy a particularly satisfying pattern, knowing there are many more to come, then swirls to another pleasing focus. In literature, the reader structures a particular work according to her experience knowing there is more than one possible interpretation; the more critical experience she gains, the more comfortably she can move between interpretive stances. Thus the reader is capable of deconstructing a work as much as of constructing it, moving playfully from one view to another, focusing and unfocusing, shifting from one pattern to the next. This ability to view any phenomenon from many different angles is universal and applicable to all forms of discourse, no matter how large or small.

Take for example the following six-line poem, written by H.D. in 1914:

Oread

Whirl up, sea--
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir (55).

From a formalist stance, this little poem's powerful tension stems from the clashing imagery of the sea as pine forest inundating the land with "pools of fir," a clash echoed in the concentration of strong bilabial stops (the p in "up," "pointed pines," "splash. . . pines,") against alveolar liquids r and l ("whirl," "hurl," "fir"). The paradoxical synthesis of opposing tensions achieves perfect expression in the last phrase, "pools of fir," framed phonetically by the two contradictory sounds, the first long and relaxed, the second short and tense; the last phrase recaps the semantic antithesis between water and fir (or "fur" or even "fire") as well.

H.D., Hilda Doolittle, occupied the center of the Imagist circle and intimately associated with Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, and Richard Aldington (whom she married). Through the efforts of the feminist movement in literature, she has become one of the "hottest" poets of the 1980's.

The central role of the startling image naturally brings the avant-garde movement Imagism to mind, and so formalism invites the historical/cultural criticism of the poem as representative of its cultural-aesthetic zeitgeist (the spirit of the times). According to this view, the poem accomplishes the Imagist ideal of epiphaneous, instantaneous, revelation through the union of persona and nature: In "Oread," "the spirit of the Greek mountain-nymph comprehends the waves of the ocean as the pines of her own shore, in one dynamic and unified complex," says Louis Martz, editor of H.D.'s Collected Poems (xiv). So the poem can be discussed as a prototype of and symbol for a whole literary movement. Moreover, it has a wider, cultural and historical, context--the avant-garde and WW I, and, thus, can also be seen as a typically modernist call for a liberating apocalypse: The nymph yearns for the flood just as the modernist yearned for the catastrophe of W.W. I (at least at its beginning), believing that only by sweeping away the old, decaying, world could a new world be built. "I feel it weigh on my brain. An oppression sings in the blood," wrote the Expressionist Ernst Stadler in 1913, impatiently calling for the cycle of death and rebirth to take its course: "To the end that blesses. To conception's rite. To pleasure's consummation. To prayer. To the sea. To self's undoing."

The nature of the persona in the poem, a nymph associated with the Greek goddess Artemis, begs for a mythic interpretation as well. In it, the trinitarian goddess of virginity, fertility, and infernal mystery (Diana, Luna, Hecate), longs for Dionysus, worshipped by the Corinthians in the form of a pine tree (Frazer 450). This song of sexual liberation can be further interpreted as a song of feminist liberation, for the nymph finds strength in androgyny, in being ocean, forest, seashore, and mountain simultaneously. From a feminist perspective one can argue that H.D. is trying to reintegrate and heal the multiple, splintered, faces of the earth goddess. Myth and feminism bring to mind Sappho, and, indeed, critic Eileen Gregory sees Sappho as the motivating force behind H.D.'s early "sea garden" poetry: "She [Sappho] is the goddess who guards it, the sea that washes it, and the spirit informing the poet who suffers her ecstasies within it" (536).

If H.D.'s spiritual mother was Sappho, then her spiritual father was Freud. (She studied with him, and in her writings referred to him as "Papa.") So next, "Oread" can open up to psychological criticism. According to Susan Stanford Friedman, H.D. saw dream and poetic imagery as hieroglyphs from the unconscious which she would decode in her quest for self-knowledge (59). Friedman applies to our example the psychoanalytic terms "condensation" and "displacement": Through the first, it fuses contradictory opposites (phallic, aggressive, sea-pines and passive land, soft wave and hard rock); and, through the second, H.D. displaces her voice into the mask of the oread, who, in turn, displaces her identity and sexual emotions onto nature (57-8). On the other hand, from a Jungian perspective, one can study the poem in terms of primordial archetypes, for it is permeated with mother symbols: earth, woods, and sea, "the favourite symbol for the unconscious, the mother of all that lives" (Jung 177-8). And here, again, feminist criticism can add insight if we connect Jung's mother symbol to the Demeter-Kore myth cycle and the theme of mythic rejuvenation through matriarchal mysteries.

If this whirling dance from one shutter snap to another has a somewhat dizzying effect, I offer it only as a paradigmatic, metaphoric, glimpse. The actual complex process which we, as students and teachers of literature, undergo allows rather stable benefits: open-ended discussion, honest awareness of our own premises, democratic tolerance of other points of view, and a realistic and sympathetic understanding that there are more than two sides to every aspect of reality. In other words, the intellectual ability to maintain the delicate balance between multiple and disparate perceptions. As the kaleidoscope unfolds its geometric blossoms, we can learn to adjust our eyes and minds in agile wonder. We can view each budding design as a promising variety in a hybrid bouquet of abstractions--interpretation through interpenetration, crossbreeding fortifying essences. Each design dismantles yet reinforces the other designs at different levels (different, not hierarchical). In the example of "Oread," each approach helps enhance the credibility of the next one because all of them point to an all-consuming consummation of opposites, psychosexual and emotional, mythical and linguistic. The dancing shapes of the kaleidoscope all move around in the same circle, all intersect at the same center.

Yet, as close as these meanings are to each other, they are not identical; the student of literature must remind herself of Northrop Frye's words:

> The genuine critic works out his own views of literature while realizing that there are also a great number of other views, actual and possible, which are neither reconcilable nor irreconcilable with his own. They interpenetrate with him, and he with them, each a monad as full of windows as a Park Avenue building (245).

Frye's metaphor of many-windowed buildings all facing the same street had been my favorite for years until I came up with my "kaleidoscope," which I prefer because it is dynamic rather than static and freely allows the reader to play as many roles as she wants. I now believe in eclecticism rather than in monadism, concurring in Annette Kolodny's statement that "only by employing a plurality of methods will we protect ourselves from the temptation of. . .oversimplifying any text" (511).

An open-ended acceptance of manifold meanings can, finally, serve to demystify the critical process for the student of literature by freeing her from the despotism of singular approaches. When I was in graduate school, the buzzword in my poetry classes was affects; literary analysis meant essentially one thing: elucidating the chain of affects moving through a poem. Today's graduate students have moved on to another Little A--the one in differance. I believe that a heavy or exlusive emphasis on one or the other amounts to paralyzing tyranny. The truth is that literary criticism, like anything else, starts inside the individual; each sees first the shapes he or she wants to see in the kaleidoscope. So actually, reader response is, in a way, the source of all critical methods since our "objective" conclusions cannot help but grow out of our "subjective," intuitive, stirring of response to life's experiences, to be reinforced later by reading habits and conventions. Thus, it is much more honest to encourage these subjective stirs in each individual student, letting feeling, image, question, and doubt slowly evolve into open-ended, organic, hypotheses, than to indoctrinate in frozen formulas.

The student who is given a chance to encounter literature in a natural and personal way will feel much more secure about the pluralistic, open-ended: approach than the student schooled didactically to perform certain abstract operations on the body of literature. At the same time, she will gain a trust and confidence in her own critical abilities by developing her feelings and ideas into a coherent theory. If and when she follows a pre-established critical path or convention, she will do so in an active and creative, rather than servile, way. In this manner, she will be able to focus and frame a single view in her kaleidoscope, but she will also know its variegated metamorphoses.

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15 WHAT IS THE GAP, AND HOW DO WE BRIDGE IT?

Brigraj Singh

My title is taken from Composition and Literature: Bridging the Gap edited by Winifred Bryan Horner. The references that contributors to this volume make to such early phenomena as Hugh Blair's attempts in the eighteenth century to teach his students both literature and writing by lecturing on rhetoric and belles lettres, or that at their inception several English departments in this country were regarded as departments of composition and language rather than of literature, serve as a prelude to the lamentation that today a gap has developed between the activities of teaching composition and teaching literature, or between teaching writing and teaching reading (Corbett 170-73, Horner 3).

There are complex historical, economic and sociological reasons for this gap. They have been admirably analyzed by contributors to Horner's book and need not detain us here. What does need to be said is that the book was commissioned in 1980 and appeared in 1983 (1). Since then, thanks in part to the ability of her contributors to make the view prevail that the gulf is as unnecessary as it is academically ruinous, but essentially because a large number of English teachers have begun to feel that the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction and that it is time to realize that literature can be profitably introduced in the composition class, the gap has shown signs of shrinking. To talk from personal experience, my college, where there was hardly any attempt to use literature texts in composition courses, only this past year adopted Lynn Klamkin and Margot Livesay's anthology Writing about Literature as the text for a writing course. This book is only one of several writing-through-literature anthologies that have recently begun to flood the market, coincidentally at around the same time that Robert Scholes, in The Power of Text, has suggested innovative strategies for incorporating literary readings in writing classes, and E.D. Hirsh, in Cultural Literacy, has argued the need for literary readings as the foundation of good writing. Both works have found receptive audiences and are gaining recognition and success: the former was awarded the Mina Shaughnessy award for 1986, and the latter is on the current bestseller list. All these developments make it safe to surmise that the phenomenon witnessed in my college will soon spread to other two-year colleges, if it hasn't done so already.

When this happens, writing teachers may well be faced with the question of how to use literature effectively in composition classes, not only because notions of what constitutes literature are in ferment and student's attitudes to literary studies have changed, but also because an increasing number of writing teachers in two-year colleges have been trained in the pedagogy of ESL or of composition rather than as literary critics, and may need therefore to readjust their sights. As they turn to the literary theory of the past decade or decade and a half in order to find a better grounding for their new responsibilities, they are likely to be cheered by the fact that the following ideas, which have become almost axiomatic in literary studies today, also provide many possibilities for the creative and effective bridging of the gap between composition and literature:

1. The notion of a literary canon, if it ever existed, has now been demolished, at least for our generation. Everything that is written is not regarded as literature: in this respect the word has not gone back to its root meaning of letters. Indeed, many critics no longer talk of "litera-

ture," preferring instead the work "text," the assumption being that whereas our definition of what constitutes literature is likely to reflect our socio-economic, educational and cultural assumptions, the term "text" is more neutral and objective. Any linguistic act can be a text: as such, the term opens up our concepts of what is worth attention, when the word "literature" would tend to limit them. Roland Barthes, going one step further, extends the meaning of the word "text" to cover not only linguistic acts but also any significant manifestation or phenomenon whatever, for example pinups, couture fashions, indeed "the fabric of life, of the street" (qtd. in Leitch 48).

2. The same techniques that are used on so-called literature are used also in the most commonplace or casual piece of writing. Recently J. Hillis Miller has reaffirmed in "Composition and Decomposition: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Writing" that all language is metaphorical (48), and Hayden White has maintained in both Metahistory and Tropics of Discourse that any attempt to make meaning inevitably requires the use of tropes, of suppression, and of selection. If reality cannot be known except through language, and all language is metaphorical and tropological, it follows that we are engaged in studying tropes and metaphors whether we study the thought of Milton in our role as literary critics or whether we encourage our composition freshmen to become aware of themselves through their own and their peers' writing. This apercu opens the door for the location of texts, both canonical and non-canonical, in the composition class and allows composition teachers to use their skills as literary critics even when their text is the daily rag's agony column which they are using as a composition teaching tool.

3. From the first two propositions it follows that the teaching of literature in the composition class can no longer proceed in terms appropriate only to the analysis of the established canon. We can afford to talk of myth and ritual as little as we can to talk about irony and ambiguity and paradox, or

about plot and theme and character--or rather, we have to understand that these terms must be subsumed under others which will enable students to write journal entries with the same self-awareness and insight that they bring to a reading of Shakespeare or a newspaper article. What some of these new terms must be has already been indicated--text, troping, metaphor, suppression--and some more will be suggested presently. Here I must clarify that what is being advocated is not the introduction of new theories and new-fangled terminology in the writing classroom. Rather, what I hope to show is that the composition teacher who approaches her task via a grounding in current literary theory is likely to find it rendered more congenial because of her predisposition toward angles of approach, methods of analysis and pedagogical strategies that presuppose the ability to discourse about one kind of writing in terms which are equally relevant to others.

4. Composition and literature--or writing and reading--are not merely related but are aspects of the same activity. Nor is this only because both involve interpretation and self-criticism, or, as has been said, because writing is but another name for reading the world, and reading another name for writing the world. It is also because, as so much scholarship attests, writing is a convention which we acquire by being part of. Just as we would never learn to speak if we never heard a sound, so we would never learn to write unless we were exposed to some writing. This is not merely because we learn to write by imitating models; rather, all discourse is discourse on discourse, all writing about writing, and therefore writing is not possible unless it is preceded by, goes simultaneously with, and results in, the reading of other writing. Clearly, then, what critics from Northrop Frye to the deconstructionists have seen as the self-referential nature of writing, or what Bakhtin has chosen to see as its dialogical nature, is similar to the compositionists' view of it as social and

audience-directed. Here is another critical perception with which the composition teacher is likely to be in accord.

The above four propositions are commonplace enough, but they are so precisely because of the revolution that critical theory has wrought in the field of literary studies. More specifically, they have become commonplace as a result of the wide spread dissemination of that branch of literary theory known as poststructuralism or deconstruction. They do not, in themselves, constitute the essence of this movement or serve to define it, but they are a logical and natural outcome of poststructuralist or deconstructionist perspectives.

Deconstruction is not, however, a doctrine which composition theorists have generally befriended. Insofar as critical theories have influenced composition theory and practice, the most notable has been reader-response theory. The names of Louise Rosenblatt, E.D. Hirsch and Wolfgang Iser are as familiar to teachers of composition as to teachers of literature. But Derrida, de Man and Hillis Miller are better known to literary theorists than to writing teachers. It says something that in their review of composition theory and literary theory John Clifford and John Schilb give nine and a half pages to reader-response theory but only three to deconstruction; equally revealing is their comment on attempts to fuse deconstruction with composition theory and practice: "Many composition instructors...will find poststructuralist theory uncongenial..." (58).

Why have composition theorists generally kept aloof from deconstruction when, as I have attempted to show, the composition teacher is likely to be in accord with approaches to literature that have been opened up by deconstruction?

In answering this question it may be helpful to keep in mind the great variety of deconstructionist thought and practice, and the impossibility of reducing it to a unified system or philosophy. Vincent B. Leitch makes this point well. He quotes

Barthes as saying that deconstruction involves the disappropriation of the text (49) in order to achieve which the critic must allow a licentious play to signifiers, writing in fragments, digressions, excursions, (50) and thus enabling the subject, "instead of establishing itself, [to be lost]" (51). Perhaps no critic exemplifies this method better than Derrida; but, as Leitch shows, whereas deconstructionist reading remains for Barthes an act of "solitary radicalism," (52) for the latter it is inescapably tied to "pedagogical theory and practice" (46) and becomes a means for affecting radical transformation in the academy and in society at large. In the United States Hillis Miller follows the Barthean and Derridean injunction to destabilize texts, insisting on the "undecidability" of meaning and showing how in Wallace Stevens' "Rock," for instance, each figure becomes the center of the work, defined as such by the other figures, only to find itself helping to define these other figures as the center, with the result that the reader is unable to decide what the true center of the work is, or whether it has a center at all ("Stevens' Rock" 11, 17, 19). But unlike as with Derrida, Miller's explosive readings are carried out in the most formal, structured and academic prose; again, unlike as with Derrida, his deconstruction does not seek to effect any radical political transformation. Instead, he hopes that it will save the academy from the assaults of both the Right and the Left (Presidential Address 289-91).

If, then, composition teachers have been inclined to ignore deconstruction, one reason may simply be that they have felt rather uncertain about the kind of deconstructionist thought and practice they should try to relate to, Barthean, Derridean, that of Miller or of someone else. Matters aren't helped any by deconstruction's refusal to privilege one reader as the spokesman for the others or to see itself as a "school." Not that any unanimity exists among compositionists. W. Ross Winterowd points out that there are at least two kinds on composition theory which, following Richard Young, he labels "vitalism" and "current-traditionalism" ("Purification" 267), while Lester Faigley sees an even greater number of competing theories which he calls expressive, the cognitive and the social. Indeed, he finds that "conceptions of writing as a process vary from theorist to theorist" (527). But although compositionists are aware of their differences, they also seek to work through them toward the establishment of a clearly defined discipline. Deconstruction, on the other hand, revels in subverting all disciplines.

Furthermore, when scholars have tried to establish links between deconstruction and composition, they have, as often as not, emphasized precisely those aspects of deconstructionist writing which composition teachers are most likely to reject. For example, Winterowd suggests that since the deconstructionist's position is that it is impossible to know with certainty what anything means, using deconstructionist insights to teach writing may involve shifting the emphasis away from goal-directed thought and meaning-making and toward the free play of doubt, irony, and explorations which may not necessarily get anywhere ("Post-Structuralism" 86). To which the composition teacher may well be tempted to reply that while linear or teleological thought may no longer be privileged, and ironical explorations deserve all encouragement, meaning matters too, and writing that refuses to take meaning seriously may itself fail to be taken seriously.

The fact is that insofar as the various practitioners of deconstruction can be seen as sharing a common set of assumptions, they center around the question of meaning and referentiality of language. Deconstruction, be emphasizing that the signifier has floated free of the signified, that we have only signifiers to work with, and that if there are any signifieds they remain inaccessible to us, also emphasizes that there is no possibility of making any meaning of or in the world. The words we use to describe the world ultimately point only to themselves. As such, deconstruction sets itself up in opposition to Western metaphysics (Jameson, Prison-House 173-74; Miller, "Ariachne" 60, "Critic as Host" 251.) Composition theory, on the other hand, remains within the confines of Western metaphysics by positing that words point to something other than themselves and so it is possible to perceive and communicate meaning through language. At the epistemological level the break between composition theory and deconstruction seems total.

Yet, as I have suggested above, the two hold many assumptions about the writing process in common. This is hardly surprising when we remember that both developed around the same time, and that both grow out of, and are a response to, conditions which have characterized the Western world in the last two decades. Though owing to Freud, Saussure and other earlier thinkers, deconstruction became a significant force in the academy in the late 60's and 70's. In a sense it acknowledges the bankruptcy of liberal Western thought, which it also seeks to overthrow. A society that rejects the imperatives of Marxist as well as Christian teleology, that knows that it has achieved an unprecedented level of affluence, and that senses that there are no great issues left to be fought for, is also inclined to feel that history has come to a stop. In such a situation life becomes mere jouissance, play. Since equality has been achieved, if not totally then to a degree never known before, hierarchies and scales of value cease to count. One man's opinions are as meaningful or meaningless as another's, and no activity can be shown to be superior to another.

These are the conditions of life in which certain kinds of deconstruction seem to have their roots, and which they therefore express in a variety of oblique ways. Thus interpretation is rejected, for to believe in interpretation is to believe necessarily in a telos as well as a hierarchy of values. The anathema which closure becomes in both Barthes and Derrida, as well as the latter's insistence on differance, a postponement as far as possible of meaning, turn literary criticism into an infinitely regressive activity and invest it with the qualities of a never-ending game. Hence the complex and subtle wordplay in deconstructionist criticism, which is a species of writing that constantly doubles back on itself, mocking, questioning, exploring, only to nullify everything including its own insights. Meaning is not something transcendental to be achieved through writing; it is immanent in the act of writing itself. Writing is meaning.

Like deconstruction, composition theory has its roots in the past (Woods 39, Rose 342), but like deconstruction it came into its own only in the 70's. Whether or not Gaullist France had anything to do with the rise of deconstruction (Jameson, Prison-House 160-61), there is general agreement that the influx of a new kind of student into American colleges was responsible, to a certain extent, for the growth of composition theory, which can therefore be seen, like deconstruction, as the outcome of the sociological conditions and ideological imperatives of our times. Like deconstruction, the theory of writing as process deemphasizes the end. Like deconstruction, writing as process emphasizes recursiveness, re-writing, re-visions. Like deconstruction, it abolishes hierarchies: there is no good or bad writing, only experienced and inexperienced writers. Finally, as with deconstruction, writing as process sets up the writing act itself as the privileged activity. We write to understand; but since (especially when revising), we write about what has already been written, our understanding of the world becomes synonymous with our understanding of our own writing, which we can understand only by writing more. Composition theory is not altogether free of the self-reflexiveness or rather, self-referentiality, which characterizes deconstruction.

Indeed, there are so many affinities between deconstruction and composition theory that it is possible to demonstrate that a teacher influenced by the former should have no difficulty assenting to the major tenets of the latter. More than pedagogical tools, deconstruction provides a way of seeing; and its ways of seeing have enough similarities with the insights of composition theorists for the literary critic turned compositionist to absorb them quite naturally into her mindset.

Thus Janet Emig and several later composition theorists have argues that writing is not a linear activity but one where the writer keeps pausing, revising, and going back over what she has written before going forward once more. The word that Emig has popularized for describing this complex process is "recursive"; in essence its use becomes the compositionist's shorthand for subverting the positivistic psychology that sees the mind's operations as logical, sequential and ordered. The concept of recursiveness has particular appeal to the deconstructionist. For whether we think of Derrida carrying on a dialogue with what exists on the margins of his text, or of Miller who builds an interpretation on certain planks only to knock them, and therefore the interpretation itself, down, it is as clear that deconstruction sees little value in positivism as that the notion of both reading and writing as a constant back-and-forth movement, unsettling and never-ending, is of major importance to it.

Again, Peter Elbow in arguing the case of writing without teachers, and other advocates of collaborative writing such as Kenneth Bruffee, are desirous of subverting the authority of the teacher in the classroom. Either the teacher is allowed to remain, but only as a "facilitator" rather than as the center of authority, or else she is made to disappear altogether as in Elbow's teacherless class. Elbow's concept is based upon a philosophical premise that would decenter institutions, dismantle authority, and disseminate power to all constituents of society. This is precisely what deconstruction wishes to achieve. Hence its refusal to privilege any one reading over others, and its attempts to maintain a sense of ferment by constantly marginalizing the center or centering the marginal. The democratic, anti-authoritarian impulse that sees writing as an equal transaction between writers rather than as an unequal one between the writer and the teacher.

Elbow, by emphasizing freewriting, also emphasizes the idea that writing is not a transcription of prior knowledge but a way of discovering knowledge, that we learn as we write. In Britton's celebrated phrase, we shape at the point of utterance. The concept that knowledge is not something "out there," something transcendental, but that it is immanent in the writing act through which alone it can be known, is similar to the deconstructionist view that if there is a meaning anywhere it is immanent in the text itself, not extrinsic to it. One reason why deconstruction rejects interpretation is because, as Jameson explains, interpretation always involves the imposition of an external interpretive code upon the text (Political Unconscious 58, 77). But such an imposition necessarily privileges that interpretive code and elevates it to the position of the signified. Deconstruction, however, rejects the view that we can know any signifieds. Since signifiers are all that we have, it wants the interpretation to proceed from within the signifier (i.e. the text) itself. But when the critic tries to read the meaning of a work, no meaning can emerge, for meaning--the explanation of one thing in terms of another--requires the existence of a master code or a signified which the signifier, by its very nature, neither is nor can supply. Hence for the deconstructionist all meaning-making efforts are doomed to fail. Of course, deconstruction's rejection of interpretation is not a position that either Elbow or Britton would uphold. But like the deconstructionist they reject the notion of meaning as transcendental, and view it instead as being rendered possible by the writing act itself.

In differentiating the experienced from the inexperienced writer Mina Shaughnessey develops the notion of premature closure. She says that while the experienced writer "reveals a much greater tolerance for...'an attitude of suspended conclusion'," the inexperienced writer reaches closure upon a given point much more rapidly. The experienced writer has a greater ability to prolong an argument, maintain a sense of uncertainty, or let an issue hang in balance than the inexperienced writer, "whose thought seems to halt at the boundary of each sentence rather than move on...to an elaboration of the sentence" (227). What to Shaughnessey is a mark of inexperience is to Barthes and Derrida a philosophical error, an impossible demand for transcendence. But though their reasons and perceptions may differ, both Shaughnessey and the deconstructionists are opposed to premature closure.

Thus there is little reason for the compositionist to stay aloof from deconstruction, even though he may not assent to all the philosophical positions of deconstructionist critics. In the rest of the paper I wish to explore in further detail the contention the deconstructionist insights can be beneficially used in the composition class, and thus bridge what still remains a widely perceived gap, that between composition and deconstruction, or decomposition if you will.

Contemporary critical theory, of which deconstruction is a part, has destroyed the belief in the integrity and definition of the subject. It has taught us that when we use the first person singular, the "I" is not a fixed entity but flickering, shifting, constituting itself in the act of constituting its discourse, its context, and its interlocutor. This insight, as C. Mark Hurlbert has shown, has obvious uses in the composition class. It forces us, when reading literature, to ask questions about the way in which the author's understanding of his context and audience compel him to adopt strategies of argumentation and persuasion, and the way in which the author becomes available to us only through a perception of these strategies. These questions serve not only to reinforce the view that all composition teachers hold, _viz_. that the writer should always keep his audience and purpose in mind, but also act as a prelude to a variety of educative writing tasks. Students can be encouraged to try on different roles and discover how, for example, the meaning of what they write will, in a real sense, be dictated by whether they are writing as taxpayers to the IRS or as parents to a son who is asking for money. Students can be asked to write in their "natural" selves, and through other students' responses it can be brought out that even the natural self is a creation of context and audience, so that there is no necessary dichotomy between one's natural self and various other selves--indeed, the terms are irrelevant. And if, as Wayne Booth suggests, these questions lead to a consideration of truthfulness and dishonesty, why, all the better (69). The teacher will not have the answers, but through a practical and pragmatic application of deconstructionist insights she will not only have enabled the generation of interesting writing but also set a valuable educational process of analysis, questioning and self-discovery in motion.

She will have done more. She will have made the student realize that if we cannot utter anything without giving something about ourselves away, and if to ask what we are is at least in part to ask how others see us when we are engaged in the act of seeing ourselves as we think we are, then three consequences follow: (a) When reading literature, we become more conscious about finding meaning not only in what is said but also by whom it is said, to whom, when, how, and why: we learn, that is, to read between the lines. (b) Meaning exists not as an objective reality, nor even in the mind of the subject, but as a function rather of the entire structure of the world of which the subject is a part and which he helps to define. In a word, meaning is the outcome of a dialogue between ourselves and everything around us. That being so, group work in class is only a formal codification of a meaning-making process whose essence is collaboration. All writing is collaborative writing, all reading collaborative reading, and collaboration is itself but another name for the concretization of audience, self and context. (c) There is no dichotomy between writing about ourselves and writing about other things. There is a subjective element in the most objective writing; equally, nothing can be so personal that it ignores context and purpose. This perception can be useful in helping overcome the aversion that many students experience toward "objective," as opposed to "subjective" writing.

The notion of meaning making being a dialogic process is closely related to another deconstructionist insight: the text is never completed since the dialogue never ends. Derrida argues that even a printed and published text cannot be regarded as final. This standpoint, too, is useful in the composition class. The teacher can begin by considering the various drafts a text has undergone--the Declaration of Independence, for example, which has the further advantage of showing how a number of writers collaborated to produce a final text--and see how each revision alters the meaning to a greater or lesser degree. From here she can explore how one set of meanings can be created only by suppressing others, and how the recovery of suppressed meanings results in a rewriting of the text, or, rather, in the creation of a new one. Peer response can help students recover suppressed meanings in their own writings, meanings that they were perhaps not even aware of, and the exercise can result in the undertaking of revision and rewriting, which then becomes not merely the substitution of one word for another but a novel way of regarding or interpreting a given set of facts or phenomena. Compositionists have underlined the centality of revision to the writing process. The use of deconstructionist insights can help the composition teacher not only get across to students the truth of the dictum that all writing is rewriting, but also make them see what revision really means. Linda Flower et al. have confessed that composition teachers find this lesson hard to teach (16). Approaching the problem via deconstruction may perhaps yield more success.

So strong has been the challenge of deconstruction in American universities that competing literary theories have been hard put to resist it. One theory that has sought not so much to resist as to appropriate deconstruction to its own ends has been the neo-Marxism of Fredric Jameson as propounded in The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. It is characteristic of Jameson's thought that while he sees Marxism, especially Althusserian Marxism, as the most coherent and compelling philosophy for the interpretation of human affairs, he does not therefore rule out rival systems opposed to it. Rather, by allowing that they are capable of providing local explanations for texts whose overarching explanation lies in a Marxist vision of history, he is able to accommodate them within this vision. Thus his theory absorbs into it not only deconstructionists but also other thinkers as diverse as Goldmann (43-44), Greimas (46), Deleuze and Guittar (58) and Levi-Strauss (77-79). However, the argument that Jameson wants to establish is not that Marxism can be shown to "contain" deconstruction, but rather that, unlike deconstruction, Marxism does not reject interpretation. The meaning that Marxism finds is always related to class struggle and always historical, but texts do not express this historical meaning directly. History is, in fact, the "political unconscious" which texts often seek to suppress, deny, distort or displace; as such it forms not just a subtext but an "absent" text which is nowhere present in the work being interpreted (35), but without which the work would not have been possible, and which it is the critic's task to (re)construct after the fact (81-82). Jameson sees this kind of activity variously as "culture study" (10), "culture analysis" (287) and "culture criticism" (297).

Because the Jamesonian model throws deconstruction into a new perspective by appropriating instead of repudiating it, the composition teacher who is sympathetic to deconstruction is likely to find that the introduction of Jameson's culture criticism in the writing class offers a novel and subtle way of using deconstruction to teach writing. By helping to set up a sustained dialogue between the individual student and the class the teacher can help the student see for himself the extent to which what he regards as natural or obvious is the product of a particular historical and cultural moment, and based upon latent assumptions of the dominant as well as the various sub-cultures we inhabit. That is, the teacher can enable the realization that not only is the world reflected, created or apprehended by the word, but also that it "is always/already inside the word" (Morgan 453), and so writing is a way both to embody the world and to reach below the word to that notion of the world which governs our use of words in the first place.

A useful writing activity may therefore be to set in motion a dynamic of analysis which will make the student generate further writing about the cultural, economic and political bases and biases of his original piece. Through this process of analysis and discovery and unearthing, undertaken in and through his writing, the student will learn how all writing is based upon values that are nowhere given articulation in the text but which make the text possible. The student will learn, that is, the sense in which suppressed or absent elements can be said to form an integral part of the text. By learning to create a bridge between the stated and the unstated the student will be able to turn writing into an instrument not only for self-discovery but also for the development of a cultural and critical consciousness. Jamesonian Marxism offers the teacher of writing a fine opportunity for turning writing into an activity at once self-reflexive and reflective on the world, one through which the mind of the student reflects upon the consciousness in the act of growing conscious of itself, while it simultaneously engages in a reflection on the way in which it is constituted by the history it inhabits. Put very simply, students learn that writing is neither wholly innocent, nor wholly transparent, nor wholly cognitive, nor wholly constitutive of reality, but also a product of the history it seeks in part to reveal and in part cannot but conceal.

I have argued that deconstructionist theory can reinforce the composition teacher's attempts to teach the importance of context and audience, the centrality of revision to writing, the value of dialogue in writing endeavors, the habits of self-reflection, and the recovery of the historical and cultural bases of all thought. It is not my contention that these tasks cannot be performed without the help of deconstruction. Deconstructionist thought suggests a philosophical set of assumptions for undertaking them. But all good teachers, whether deconstructionist or not, undertake them successfully, and indeed the only qualifications necessary for doing so are intelligence and flexibility and imagination and ingenuity. But these are also the qualities needed if one would teach literature well. The final bridging of the gap between composition and literature, or between deconstruction and composition, takes place, then, in the personality of the good teacher, whether of composition or of literature.

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16 UNDERSTANDING THE READING PROCESS: HOW DOES THE CHILD CONSTRUCT MEANING WITH LITERATURE?

Susan Lehr

Introduction

Recent studies have explored the child's developing sense of theme as it relates to generating or identifying main idea(s) in narrative or prose passages. How well children generate meaning as they read has been the main focus of many of the studies (Baumann, 1981; Christie & Schumacher, 1977; Danner, 1976; Korman, 1945 cited in Yendovitskayz, 1971). Other studies have explored how well children can identify main ideas in passages (Brown & Smiley, 1977). Yet the question of theme remains largely unexplored, particularly in the area of using children's literature as a means of discussing theme. This review will begin with the child's conceptualization of the story, for it is the child's perspective of a story which reveals how meaning is structured.

Part One briefly explores the child's concept of story from a developmental perspective. In order to understand how that meaning is constructed it is important to review current models which describe the reading process. Part Two describes the reading process from several different perspectives which has implications for the teacher's attitude toward the child's construction of meaning during the reading process. Part Three focuses on the construction of meaning during reading experiences. The product of reading, which is the representation of knowledge in memory, is presented in a discussion of schema theory. This sets the stage for an exploration of how readers instantiate, or automatically pull out schema to fit contexts in texts. As readers search for meaning every effort is made to create cohesive text. The reader actively constructs meaning during the reading process. How this occurs depends upon what the reader brings to the reading act as well as textual clarity. The reader makes use of inference to guide the structuring of meaning, therefore, the strategies used in inferencing will be discussed in detail. **Part Four** presents research which elaborates how the child becomes familiar with the structure of stories and how the child builds meaning from such encounters. Research will be cited to support the notion that children can and do abstract thematic material as they read. Next the relationship between text and illustrations will be explored, since the importance of using literature with children in order to elicit thematic responses has been the focus of current studies with children.

Lastly, in **Part Five**, the child's perspective, with which the discussion began, will be explored, citing examples from Paley's (1981) observations with kindergarten children and this author's (Lehr, in press) research with kindergarten second-and-fourth-grade children. The child's perspective of meaning is crucial in understanding how meaning is constructed as children read.

I. What is a Child's Concept of Story?

Developmentally the child begins with concrete responses and moves toward abstract generalizations. Applebee's (1973) significant work describing the preschool child's sense of story would suggest that the young child has difficulty generating a story framework with a clear thematic focal point, or center. Authoring a story with a theme or moral or identifying the theme of a story is the last of the stages which Applebee identifies. He parallels this to Vygotsky's notion of "true concept," (Applebee, 1978) and the example he cites is that of a child aged 5 years 8 months. The implication is that the younger child has great difficulty generating such a narrative, and that narratives prior to this stage of development lack true theme.

Vygotsky (1971) has argued, based on his experiments with young children, that before children form concepts they use pseudoconcepts, which on the surface are similar to concepts, but are actually based on perceptions. Blocks of one color may be grouped together not because the child can abstract the concept of red or yellow, but because the child concretely perceives that the blocks comprise a set. Baumann (1981) and Baker and Stein (1981) have suggested that the child may be unable to generate theme or main idea, but may well be able to identify the concept or idea.

Applebee argues, based on children's own oral stories, that there is "little or no reorganization of events into superordinate categories or more general schematizations; the child has great difficulty in integrating individual elements from the story into any sort of general framework" (Applebee, 1978, p. 93). He states that it is not until concrete operational stages that the child can form symbolic representations which involve hierarchies of categories and subcategories. He also found that preadolescent children were unable to verbalize themes or familiar stories, common sayings and fables.

One child's response (age 10:1) when asked to tell about Little Red Riding Hood was a concise summary of the story which concluded with this sentence: "Now Little Red Riding Hood can go and see her grandmother as often as she likes" (Applebee, 1978, p. 95). The child perceived correctly that the threat of danger has now been removed from the forest. This information is an inference based on understanding one of the themes of the story-that danger lurks in the world. Thus the child constructed meaning solidly based on the thematic content of the story. Good comprehenders remember top level structures because higher level information is more easily identified (Meyer, 1977 & 1980). If such information is placed early in the text the theme can be established early, thus allowing the reader to build a context to construct meaning. This young reader matched what was known and perceived with what she encountered in reading, thus illustrating that comprehension is selective, as found in Steffenson et al. (1979). This child instantiated her knowledge structures regarding the world and inferred after a reading of the text that Little Red Riding Hood would now be safe to visit her grandmother as often as she liked. Marshall et al. (1978-79) found that fluent readers such as this infer complete text bases, thus making surface to deep structure inferences.

Traditionally comprehension of story and comprehension of thematic content have been viewed as static components, comprised of acquired skills which could be isolated and tested. The notion that interpreting a story was negotiable or subject to the reader's own worldview and perspective were not thought to be valid assumptions to make about the reading process. Rosenblatt's breakthrough book, Literature as Exploration, published in 1938, challenged traditional notions regarding the text but was not widely accepted prior to the 1970's. Thus the research has continued to reflect this text centered perspective and has not made allowances for the child's own unique perspective, even when the child's observations are solidly based on the text itself.

The following review of related literature and research examines as theoretical framework upon which the child's meaning structures are built. From this base a discussion of research done in the area of theme is explored. Selected studies are examined which suggest the importance of the child's ability to identify theme in passages read.

II. The Reading Process

A data driven view of reading holds that knowledge resides in the text and can be "unlocked" by the reader if the words are properly decoded and then encoded to gain meaning (Gibson & Levin, 1975; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). Characteristics of this model of reading include the passive view of the reader, wherein the logic of the reader is used to sift out meaning from the text. One analyzes letters, words, phrases and sentences-all elements are decomposed to their smallest parts and put together sequentially to form a whole. This view of reading has prevailed in classrooms and has affected the means of testing and evaluating students by using predetermined meaning systems to measure responses of students. This approach to meaning is fairly easy to measure if the educators and students can agree upon the predetermined meaning systems to measure responses of students. This approach to meaning is fairly easy to measure if the educators and students can agree upon the predetermined responses. This view has encouraged a right and wrong perspective in evaluating comprehension. However, since meaning is fluid, one static answer will not, as has been suggested in the research cited, generally satisfy the demands of all readers. To read successfully in this type of model one must acquire the author's meaning. The stance taken more recently in research and evaluation of comprehending behavior suggests that is not always possible, nor is it desirable. Carried to an extreme a bottom-up model of reading would require readers to reach identical interpretations of text.

As a reaction to this theory of reading the top-down model was developed. A conceptually driven model begins with the reader and what is contained in the reader's head. This approach is characterized as "knowledge based" (Goodman, 1976; Kolers, 1975; Levin & Kaplan, 1970). Essentially the reader comes to the text with knowledge structures in the head. The reader relies on what he or she already knows to gain meaning. She samples the text, yet uses little visual data to gain meaning. The reader chunks information and uses redundant patterns of language to speed processing. Decoding and encoding are rather like one process. Critics of this approach state that it ignores the reader's ability to decode automatically with or without context (Stanovich, 1980). Fluent readers decode more quickly than less fluent readers regardless of contextual clues. Allington and Strange (1977) found however that fluent readers will miscue to create a meaningful text, whereas less fluent readers will read words accurately with meaning loss when manipulated text is used. Also the bridge between surface and deep structure in analyzing the miscues of readers is vaguely defined. Thus the link-ups to meaning are often nebulous.

Both models carried to their extremes ignore the strengths of each other. An interactive approach combines the strengths of both approaches, yet is closer on the continuum to the top-down approach (DeBeaugrande, 1979; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977; Schank, 1977). The strength of the interactive approach is the view that what is in the reader's head is processed at the same time as the words on the page are read. Multiple processing occurs from orthographics to lexical knowledge to syntactic knowledge to semantics. The reader may well use context to gain meaning, but may stop to analyze the features of a word at a skills level. When one reads, one may have to reread a segment to gain sense for the whole. The poor reader may rely heavily on context to move efficiently to meaning. The fluent reader can infer more efficiently than the poor reader (Tierney et. al., 1978-79), can reason more logically than the less fluent reader (Kavale & Schreiner, 1981), is not context bound in word identification (Allington & Strange, 1977), and is able to identify superordinate ideas more efficiently than the poor reader (Meyer, 1977).

A transactional view of reading rejects the interactive model and its basic assumptions are that:

1) the text is less an object than a potential that is actualized during the act of reading;

2) understanding arises out of the compenetration of reader and text and is thus something unique to that event;

3) text is an open system and therefore variation in interpretation is the expected response. (Siegel, 1983).

This view of the reading process is useful in that text is seen as an open system in which interpretation will necessarily vary among respondents. This component extends the interactive model beyond processing and suggests a reason for the disparity found among readers during the construction of meaning. Interpretation is therefore fluid. A component that must be clarified in the transactional view, however, is the specific notion that interpretation must be text-congruent. A reader and text come together to create a poem (Rosenblatt, 1978); however that newly created poem must be congruent with the text from which it derives its potential if it is to be understood in light of the text from which it co-evolves. If it is to be a transaction which has shared understanding. Part of the problem seems to be one of focus. Rosenblatt is more concerned with process, whereas the argument of other transactions is concerned with product. Rosenblatt (1978) suggests that the reader must possess competence in the phonemic and syntactic systems of the language and be able to understand what the words stand for. She also writes about the reader's ability to complete a decoding of the text. Therefore, Rosenblatt does not ignore the crucial role of the reading of the text. The reader must be able to complete the reading of the text at the word and meaning level in order to create the "poem." Rosenblatt cites recent research that children's errors in reading are often misreadings which occur at the level of expectation or frames formed for texts rather than misreadings of individual words (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Siegel (1983) suggests that a weakness of interactive theory is that during analysis in comprehension research propositions or meaning units can be coded as errors or intrusions. She views this duplication of the text as rigid measure of comprehension in interactive models. Rather it can be viewed as text-congruency, much in line with Rosenblatt's theory of the role of text as it relates to "misreading" at the expectation level. The problem with accepting the range of all interpretations for a text is that not all readers attend to what is written in the same manner. Some readers are unable to process certain information contained in a text. Consequently, the resulting interpretations are equally error free. The fact remains that a new "poem" will be created by each reader regardless of accuracy of input, nonetheless distinctions of text-congruency are necessary when analyzing comprehension of readers. The level to which each reader is capable of responding to the text will be a direct result of the reader's ability to understand the complete text. Whereas transactionists challenge template matching during reading which results in uniformity of interpretation, the issue is more directly related to the role of the text. To what extent should comprehension reflect an accurate rendering of material contained in the text? To refer to the example of Little Women it can be seen that a multitude of interpretations are possible based on a reading of one book. One might say that the book is about the role of women in the nineteenth century, one parent families, falling in love or growing into womanhood. All of these themes are possible based on a reading of the book. The role of background knowledge will be explored in another section, but it is worth noting that background knowledge will cause the reader to focus on different aspects of the story. Interpretations will thus be directly influenced by what the reader brings to the text; however, any interpretation of the story must necessarily coincide with the text itself.

The implications for the teacher's attitude toward the child's construction of meaning during the reading process, from the interactive and transactional view are several. Meaning should be the goal of reading, which in itself should be purposeful. Meaning will vary for each reader, depending on the reader's own schema and the context within which the reader and text reside (Halliday & Hasan, 1979). And lastly, meaning resides in the text and in the reader's head, and is shaped by a context, and when meshed together a transaction occurs, that is a new "poem" is created; however, if the reader's ability to construct meaning is the focus, the resulting "poem" will necessarily be text-congruent. This discussion sets the stage for a review of the studies which have explored how the child constructs meaning during the reading process.

III. The Construction of Meaning

Current theories of cognition view schemata as the "building blocks" upon which all information processing depends (Rumelhart, 1980). Any research which hopes to explore how children build meaning during the reading process must consider what schemata are and how they are utilized. Rumelhart (1980) writes that schemata are used in the interpretation of sensory data, in the retrieval of data from memory, in the organization of actions, in the determination of goals and subgoals, in the allotment of resources, and in the guidance of processing in the system.

The term schema first surfaced widely when Bartlett (1932) published, his book, Remembering, Bartlett identified schemata as a network which constructs and reconstructs new meanings and existing schemas to match present perceptions with incoming data which do not mesh with an understanding of the world. His early work with his own students has been the impetus behind much of the recent research done in this area. Rumelhart and Ortony (1977) have developed the concept more fully in The Representation of Knowledge in Memory.

Essentially schema theory accounts for the complex network of concepts which are stored in memory. These generic concepts contain variables and are assigned values by individuals. The schema is a conceptualization of knowledge which includes objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions and sequences of actions, and contains the network of interrelations held among the constituents of the concept under consideration (Rumelhart, 1980). Any schema is necessarily limited or extended by the input available. Schemata are embedded within each other, make use of part to whole and whole to part processing. Thus as a reader encounters text that reader instantiates schema to fit with the textual context.

A clock in a bedroom will be tucked into memory with specific values of "clockness" attached to it-sits on bed stand, has alarm, glows in dark, makes noise in morning, etc. (Anderson, 1977). One fills in the gaps as one reads and literally recreates the text (Iser, 1980). Warren (1979) refers to this as text-connecting and slot-filling. Instantiation is the process of automatically pulling out that information which is needed to make sense or lend clarity to a situation encountered, in this instance during the act of reading. If information is stored generically in a network of concepts stored in memory then the process of accessing that information is necessarily an extremely fast process. Furthermore, refinements and revisions are ongoing and constant as new data or input is perceived by individuals. Therefore readers can pull out concepts with values already attached. Authors cannot spell out all elements of a story. Some components must be understood to keep the flow of the narrative moving in a forward direction. The reader will instantiate the entire notion of bedroom clock being necessary. A kitchen clock has different attributes than one located in the bedroom. The author, however, need not define the features of each, because the reader draws inferences based on the instantiation of the correct schema, and fills in the gaps of the text. Individual values attached to the clock found in the bedroom may vary, but the essential function of the bedroom clock has cultural expectations already established. However, the farmer accustomed to awakening at dawn with the crow of the rooster may have different expectations for the bedroom clock. The concept is only operable if there are certain attached values which are socially defined and agreed upon. Fish (1980) argues that interpretations are communally determined. "Since all sign systems are social constructs that individuals assimilate more or less automatically, an individual's perceptions and judgments are functions of the assumptions shared by the groups he belongs to "(p.xxi). Bleich (1980) expands this idea by suggesting that the individual negotiates within that given framework. Consequently the young reader has not taken on the complete values of society, but is said to be in a formative stage of growth. Therefore, the child's instantiations of meaning may differ greatly from those of the adult.

The reader's expectations also influence the act of reading. Subjects told to read a narrative with a house buying frame of mind remembered different aspects of the story than those who were told to think as a thief would prior to being given the story (Pichert & Anderson, 1976). The former subjects tended to stress real estate advantages such as room size and access to schools or playgrounds, etc. whereas the latter were preoccupied with hedges to hide behind and windows to crawl through. One remembers what one expects to remember. Memory is selective. One actively constructs text as one reads (Blachowics, 1977). What is known is integrated with what is presented.

What one knows will also influence an understanding of text. Steffenson et. al. (1979) found that Indians reading about an American wedding had no schema for something old, something new, etc., rice, and white dresses. The reverse was also found to be true. American readers could not instantiate unfamiliar customs when reading about an Indian wedding. What this suggests is that schema are highly individualized. The constraints can be cultural or they can be more localized. How schemata are formed depend upon the experiences and perceptions of those experiences by the individual. In this experiment there were no American wedding schemata for the Indian readers to instantiate. The reverse was also true, so that the reading experience was perhaps frustrating, in that the readers either did not understand certain words or actions, and were unable to key in on words which had entire segments of meaning encoded in them. The reader's used comprehension selectively, that is, a match was made between what was known and perceived to what was encountered. Readers may have been unaware of certain information unavailable to them, due to cultural differences.

In the search for meaning readers will generally make every attempt to create a cohesive text. Readers will add information to a text to create congruity (Spiro, 1977; Blachowics, 1977), and if later given plausible information which conflicts with an unclear text the reader will reconstruct the text to fit the new information (Spiro, 1977). This search for meaning employs the use of inference. In Spiro's experiment with adults a brief narrative was presented which stated that an engaged couple disagreed on the desirability of having children, quarreled and were eventually happily married. The conflict was left intact for the reader to process. Inferences had to be made as to the resolution of the two schema states-one of disharmony and one of harmony. The subjects were asked to recall the story as exactly as possible without adding any information. The results showed that subjects reconstructed the story and added information to make the story cohesive. Subjects "remembered" that the couple had sought counseling, decided to adopt, or hadn't really had a serious argument. When the story was reversed and the couple did not marry the same reconstructive process occurred. However, when the story was presented without discongruent elements subjects made no errors in recall.

This bolsters the notion that the reader actively constructs meaning during the reading process. If a text is poorly written, the reader will still seek meaning, and apparently find meaning, but the content of that meaning does not necessarily reside in the text. This illustrates the active role of the reader in her search for meaning. Reading is not a passive activity, wherein the text is whole and the reader merely decodes. This type of research directly challenges the notion that all meaning is inherent in the text and not constructed in the mind of the reader.

Collins, Brown and Larkin (1980) write that "a central purpose of inference is to synthesize an underlying model which organizes and augments the surface structure fragments in the text" (p. 386). These inferences are guided by target structures that specify a prior constraints on the type model to be synthesized. The target structure acts as an organizational principle for guiding a set of inference procedures" (p. 386). In Spiro's study the subjects were given a target structure to instantiate specific schema.

Usually the reader must ask the questions which form the model which constrains the reading of the text. "Constraint satisfaction" is the process of forming a model by using answers to questions which lead to other questions about how schema interact with the model. If there is a fit the line of questioning will proceed. Choosing the right questions to understand a text may be the most critical skill utilized during reading. Collin's protocols do not tell educators how people choose questions during the process of making inferences while reading, but readers who ask the wrong questions do not find solutions. "By pinpointing the strategies that skilled readers use for dealing with difficulties in understanding, it should become clear what strategies unskilled readers must learn" (p. 386). How skilled readers formulate textual questions, how they employ strategies in the revision of their models and how they evaluate those models are valid concerns raised by Collins.

IV. How Children Use the Structure of Stories to Build Meaning

How do children construct story schemata? By listening to many stories and building knowledge about how story events are sequenced children construct a set of expectations about how stories function. When this internal structure is tampered with understanding is often difficult to achieve (Thorndyke, 1975). As a child encodes, the story schema acts as a general framework where comprehension processing occurs (Mandler & Johnson, 1977). Furthermore, the framework acts as a guide which signals that certain facts are to be kept in mind. The story structure also increases the predictability of what is read which simplifies processing.

Mandler & Johnson (1977) formulated a general story structure for simple stories based on Rumelhart's (1980) story grammar. They characterize the underlying structure of the story as a tree structure "which makes explicit the constituent structure and relations between constituents" (p. 115). Events are related by their tree position and by the causal or temporal node connections. Other fixed or basic nodes include settings, beginnings, reactions, attempts, outcomes and endings.

Not surprisingly, the adults in their study recalled more than the fourth graders and they in turn, recalled more than the first graders, suggesting a developmental perspective of recall. First graders tended to recall settings, beginnings and outcomes. They omitted the internal reactions of characters as well as story endings. Fourth graders showed similar results to those of the first graders and in addition the recall of attempts and outcomes was greater, but not significant. Adults lagged in their recall of endings and reactions but were able to recall the other nodes.

The results show that children are sensitive to story structure and use similar retrieval strategies to those of adults. The major differences between children and adults seem to be that children stress outcomes rather than attempts and almost ignore reactions. This study did not use probed recall, but other studies have found that children can answer questions about reactions and attempts (Berndt & Berndt, 1975; Lehr, in press; Stein & Glenn, 1978).

Using Mandler and Johnson's story grammar and the idea of "proposition" (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1978; Thorndyke, 1975) to establish the notion of independent clause, Whaley (1981) found that third, sixth and eleventh grade children had expectations for story structure corresponding to the story grammar of Mandler and Johnson. In their responses to manipulated stories children expected categories from the grammar and included them. There were age related differences that corresponded to the findings of Mandler and Johnson. Similarly, Stein & Glenn (1978) systematically deleted categories and found that children tend to fill in the deleted category. Trabasso (1977) had similar results.

Thematic Manipulation in Narrative Discourse

A comprehension model containing a hierarchical organizational framework of stories in memory, determined by grammar, and representing abstract structural components of plot has been proposed by Thorndyke (1975). He views theme as "the general focus to which the subsequent plot adheres" (p. 80).

In experiments, Thorndyke manipulated story organization and found that comprehension and recall were dependent upon the inherent plot structure in the story, regardless of story content. Subjects tended to recall high-level organizational story elements over low-level details, and as Mandler and Johnson found (1977) a general structure was recalled rather than specific content as the story became schematized in memory. When thematic statements were deleted altogether recall suffered and comprehension was lower. Apparently understanding the overall theme of a narrative guides the encoding of meaning, and without such an overarching concept, comprehensibility of narratives is difficult to ascertain.

Interpretation of Main Idea

A series of studies with elementary school children would suggest that the child is better able to recognize main idea, but lacks the ability to generate central thoughts of prose passages without specific instruction (Baumann, 1981; Dunn, Matthews & Bieger, 1979; Otto & Barrett, 1968; Taylor, 1980; Tierney et. al., 1978-79). Otto's early research with children in grades one through six tested whether children could conceptualize and generate a main idea in reading four constructed sentences. He found that children's responses were of low quality based on his scale of rating. One of the problems with Otto's scale is its penalization of responses having more abstract information in the body of the answer. A correct answer was measured as one that contained both general and specific information relating to the text.

Answers which contain more abstract information are developmentally at a higher cognitive level than those which include literal aspects of the story. Applebee's work analysing the responses of children aged 2-17 suggests that the answer which is most developed is that which steps back from the piece and speaks in more general terms. The Purves-Rippere system refers to this stage as "interpretation" which is beyond the stage of perception, and is based on characteristics of the work. Interpretation involves generalization beyond characteristics of the work (Applebee, 1978). Applebee's four developmental stages in the formulation of response include:

1) **Narration**, which occurs in the peroperational stage, and lacks integration

2) **Summarization**, which occurs in the concrete operational stage, and involves categorization

3) **Analysis** of the structure of the work or the motives of the characters; understanding through analogy, which occurs in the formal operational stage I, and involves identification

4) **Generalization** about the work; consideration of theme or point of view which occurs in the formal operational stage II, and involves understanding of the work and its effect on the reader's own views

(Applebee, 1978)

Baumann's research (1981) is perhaps most complete in terms of the generation of main idea with subjects. His findings indicate that students are able to produce main idea statements about one third of the time. A child may tacitly comprehend the main idea of a passage but be unable to produce a main idea statement (Baumann, 1981).

When narrative prose is used, subjects show greater skill in comprehension of main ideas (Brown & Smiley, 1977; Christie & Schumacher, 1977). Children may have greater facility with narrative forms because of a well developed sense of story (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1978; Thorndyke, 1975; Whaley, 1981). Furthermore, a study by Boljonis and Kaye (1980, cited in Baumann, 1981) suggests that children have little exposure to expository prose before they are introduced to content area books, which occurs around the fourth grade, and consequently have less knowledge about the structuring of nonfiction passages and are less adept at processing main idea. Boljonis and Kaye found that fourth graders showed superior recall of information presented in a narrative passage compared to a nonnarrative passage containing the same information.

Also Baumann asserts that those studies using a listening approach (Brown & Smiley, 1977; Christie & Schumacher, 1977; Danner, 1976; Meyer, 1977; Waters, 1978) have had more success with main idea comprehension than those requiring students to read selections. He hypothesizes that listening promotes main idea comprehension and reading does not. Hildyard and Olson (1979, cited in Baumann, 1981) found that students showed different patterns of comprehension after reading and listening. Main ideas were produced after listening and details were supplied after reading. Future study needs to explore the effects of listening and reading as it relates to main idea. One possible reason for the difference is that reading is a more demanding task than listening and requires additional processing of the printed material.

Generation of Theme

Research has explored the child's ability to recall thematically relevant information after listening to narrative passages. Children as young as age five will delete irrelevant information and retell logically sequenced stories that are thematically centered. In the Soviet Union, Korman (1945) studied the narrative recall of 4-6 year old children and found that the material was related in a logically sequenced manner and that certain episodes containing lower level information were deleted in the retellings, particularly those which were not pertinent to the main idea of the passage.

To extend this work Christie and Schumacher (1977) tested kindergarten, second and fifth grade children, purposely including "the critical age (i.e. 7-6 years old) at which children are expected to begin abstracting relevant thematic information and recalling this information in a logical order (Piaget, 1926, 1928)" (Christie & Schumacher, 1977, p. 599).

The results demonstrated the children's ability to recall more relevant versus irrelevant idea units in logical order, thus challenging the idea that children cannot abstract relevant thematic information before the age of 7-8, and supporting Korman's basic claims. Christie & Schumacher conclude that the kindergarten child is more capable of "abstracting and producing relevant thematic information than has previously been assumed" (p. 601).

Brown and Smiley (1977) had similar results with children's recall of the most important units in narratives presented. Recall of other levels of importance increased with age. Important to this study is the fact that Brown and Smiley used warm-up sessions to acquaint the children with the process of recalling the gist of the story. Also background knowledge about the narrative to be presented was shared with the experimental group. The results support what is already known about the importance of background information.

Fluent readers seem to have the ability to identify themes of passages read if the structure of the passage is familiar. This familiar framework allows the reader to instantiate schemata which facilitate the comprehension process. If the reader encounters structures which are not familiar, the process of understanding the author's intentions and pulling out a hierarchy of meaning is weakened, suggesting that children need a wide range of reading and listening experiences not confined to one particular structure.

Generation of thematic content is thought to be a developmental trend which entails minimally an implicit understanding of the structure to be understood. Children show facility with narrative forms due to their familiarity with such a format. As has been shown in their recall patterns of response, children are capable of remembering the main ideas in prose passages. They encounter difficulties, however, when reading lengthier nonfiction of a textbook nature.

Text, Illustrations and the Reading Process

Reading researchers have had a tendency to separate text from pictures in research situations in order to focus on the child's ability to read text without picture clues. In fact, many researchers have stripped the reading context completely by removing meaning from research situations, asking subjects to read words in isolation. This approach to reading is contrary to what is known about how children learn language, how they learn to read and how they build meaning while using language to read or listen to stories. Schemata cannot be instantiated where no context exists. Part of this context is the book itself and this has been largely ignored in reading comprehension studies. Shuy (1981) states:

> Research shows that good language learners begin with a function, a need to get something done with language, and move gradually toward acquiring the forms which reveal that function. They learn holistically, not by isolated skills (p. 106).

Part of this holistic context is the picture book itself complete with illustrations. Moreover, the social situation in which children hear books read involves a very specific cultural routine. In the United States the book reading experience in the home typically involves one or several children, usually siblings, a book with text and illustrations, a caretaker, a close physical proximity and a familiar setting.

Another component of the lap situation may be the interactive nature of the experience (Cazden, 1966). Heath (1981) suggests that this level of interaction may be culturally determined. Flood (1977) has found that interaction during before and after the lap experience can elicit a higher range of response from children. As children grow older, the school book sharing experience changes. Often children will remain seated at their desks, and talk during the read aloud session will be minimized; however, one component essentially remains: pictures are shared during read aloud experiences.

Current research views illustrations as beneficial for reading and listening comprehension when the pictures give redundant or additional information to the reader (Levin, 1981; Schallert, 1980). Subjects tested performed better on comprehension tasks which provided both textual and pictorial information. Levin concluded that content relevant illustrations facilitate children's learning of that content (p. 204).

Harste & Burke (1979) refer to the child who learns to read in a total environment. These "print settings" include size, shape, color, as well as the configuration of the print itself, a semiotic system based on signs from the environment. The child may not recognize a STOP sign without the benefit of context (on the corner), color (bright red), shape (octagonal), and social situation (being in a car, approaching a busy intersection and coming to a complete stop). Children learn to recognize written symbols within the framework of meaning. Separating the text from the context can render the young reader helpless and unable to function at full capability.

In a similar manner, children hear stories in the context of lap situations with real books. To test the child's knowledge of meaning that context cannot be stripped to minimal components. Pictures are a part of that setting and therefore contribute to the child's building of knowledge structures. How that occurs is not yet known and is open for further study.

Siegel (1983) worked with fourth grade children in the area of interpretation by asking students to draw sketches of meaning for books read. By employing the use of art it was felt that meaning could be communicated that would not otherwise surface if language had been the only vehicle available. Siegel discovered that the social situation effected the interpretation of what was read and how it was represented. The nature of sketching allowed a reader to reconsider the initial meaning-world and allowed the student to engage in significance rather than mere representation. That is, students related what was read to the specific context and moved from perception to interpretation. Children's sketches included signs and symbols for elaboration and explanation, which were not solicited by the researcher. Children independently linked pictorial and written symbols in order to achieve clarity and organize ideas. Many of the written conventions used by the children were meaningful only in light of the cultural context. This suggests a natural tendency of children to use a wide range of signs in constructing meaning and attempting to communicate or share that meaning. This has implications for the total reading context.

V. Theme: The child's perspective

Paley (1981) has described the growth of her kindergarten class through an entire school year with observations about the cognitive growth and development of her students. Her observations include records of story book interaction as it relates to the encoding of meaning. Her goals for the children included the development of logical thinking accompanied by the language skills necessary to articulate those thoughts. Consequently, she provided a classroom atmosphere which valued the statements of the children and encouraged oral language as a means of responding to books shared in class.

After Paley's kindergarten class heard the story of TICO AND THE GOLDEN WINGS by Leo Lionni, Lisa's retelling of the story went like this:

> "There was a bird named Tico and he didn't have any friends because all his friends had black wings and they didn't like him anymore because he asked the wishingbird for golden wings" (Paley, 1981).

Paley (1981) relates in WALLY'S STORIES that she and the children did not agree about Tico. Their observations are congruent with the story and are revealing about their own perceptions about being different. Tico is viewed as being nicer with black wings. The children do not respond to the fact that Tico originally had no wings. Wally asserts that Tico thinks he's better with golden wings, reflecting the jostling position common to the young child. Jill states that Tico has not right to be better and that the wishingbird was "wrong" to give Tico golden wings. This world view wants all children to be on an equal footing. Deana puts the full blame back on Tico by arguing that he should not have asked for the golden wings. In conclusion, Deana's position, consistent with her kindergarten world, is that Tico should share his golden wings and keep only one for himself (Paley, 1981, pp. 25-26).

In this conversation the teacher respects the consensus and does not insist that the children take her view. Their views are not inconsistent with the story and although they may not reflect the author's intentions or that of the adult, they are thematically possible based on the story itself. The children's sense of theme for this story is: "Do not make your friends jealous." It is the perspective which affords the teacher a serious look into the child's world and her or his attempts to construct meaning.

In working with kindergarten second-and fourth-grade children in a study exploring theme this author (Lehr, in press) characterized the nature of the child's sense of theme in narratives, while using children's literature. How young children learn to represent meaning in their encounters with books in naturalistic settings, and how familiarity with high-quality literature might impact on a child's developing sense of theme was the basis for exploration in this study.

In this study kindergarten, second-, and fourth-graders and were given a literature inventory (Huck Literature Inventory, Revised Lehr,

1987) to determine their familiarity with children's literature. High- and low- exposure groups were then chosen from the 10 highest- and 10 lowest-scoring students in each grade, for a total of 60 subjects. Children listened to a series of three realistic fiction and three folktales books in two sessions and were individually interviewed with questions representing a variety of perspectives. In task one children were to identify theme, whereas in task two children were to generate themes for books heard.

The 120 interview transcripts were analyzed for whether children were able to generate a statement that accurately reflected the theme for books heard. Theme statements were rated for congruency with text as well as for level of abstraction. Otto and Barrett's (1968) scale for evaluating statements of main idea was adapted, because no scale existed which measured the abstraction level of theme statements.

It was found that children are able to identify themes quite early. Kindergarten children were able to identify thematically matched books 80% of the time for realistic fiction and 35% of the time for folktales, thus indicating that thematic identification is a fairly early developmental strategy. Generating themes, however, was another matter.

Children having a low exposure to children's books, as tested by the Revised Huck Literature Inventory (Lehr, 1987), most frequently responded at levels too general to be considered thematic responses. In contrast, children familiar with a broad range of children's literature and genres typically responded to interview questions with thematic statements that were at or above concrete levels on the Thematic Scale used to rate responses.

Second-grade children paralleled kindergarten response patterns at a slightly higher thematic level. That is, the second-grade low-exposure group generated a range of thematic responses that included answers at the concrete level of stating theme and the high-exposure group included more abstract thematic responses to books heard than did the high kindergarten group. This indicated a developmental trend for group levels within and across grades.

Fourth-grade children continued the developmental parallel growth pattern of thematic response across grade and group levels, but included more variety within the low group in response to realistic fiction. This indicated a developmental awareness of themes for realistic fiction and a facility with generating a statement in that genre. Children in the fourth-grade have acquired more life experience and have more background information about how the world operates as a function of age. At this grade level the high-exposure group generated more abstract thematic statements than any other group. In all three grades there was an upward parallel growth pattern in ability to generate theme, in relation to score on the RHLI.

Three categories of response which emerged from an analysis of interview transcripts indicated that children were able to talk about thematic meaning in literature with age appropriate books (adult-congruent, text-congruent and not text-congruent). Most responses of the children were text-congruent, that differed from adult perceptions of meaning. The categories indicated that children were able to construct meaning for stories heard and that their perspectives of building meaning could not only be text-congruent, but diverse as well. This suggests that there is a blending of both the personal and the social construction of meaning. While building a community of readers in the classroom there will be diversity between themes that are discussed and accepted by the group and those which are interpreted differently by individuals which suggests a balance between socially derived meaning and personal meaning. (Hepler, 1982; Hickman, 1979, Paley, 1981).

Characteristics of child's sense of theme

Children in kindergarten were able to summarize stories heard when asked to tell what the story was about in a few words or a short form or when probed about the story from a general perspective. This ability to summarize the story enabled the child to talk about theme at a concrete level of meaning. In contrast, Applebee (1978) found that children of this age were unable to summarize stories, but had a tendency to retell entire stories. The structure and content of the interview might account for this difference. During interviews the child was specifically asked to retell the story in a few words or short form. They were specifically asked what the most important ideas were in the stories and what they thought the authors might be trying to teach them.

Children at this age level were also aware of internal motivations or reactions of characters. Seventy per cent of the kindergarten interviewed for realistic fiction mentioned the internal thought processes which motivated character actions in the stories. Knowing how or why the characters responded as they did in particular episodes was often included in thematic responses. Mandler and Johnson (1977) found that children omit internal reactions of characters during spontaneous recall. The variety of perspectives which the interview questions included may have acted as a catalyst in this respect. This supports the idea that children do take on the perspectives of others (Donaldson, 1978; Lehr, in press; Paley, 1981).

At times children had strong prior expectations for story parts, regardless of group position. Consequently, children instantiated familiar story frames to fit with prior expectations (Anderson, 1977; Spiro, 1977). As suggested in studies with background building, the children filled in confusing or missing information based on predictable patterns that they had evolved for stories (Pichert & Anderson, 1976).

Second- and fourth-grade children, particularly those in the high-exposure groups, were able to respond to stories with thematic statements which were at analysis and generalization response levels in Applebee's Developmental Formulation of Response Categories (1976). This finding was interesting because Applebee asserts that children in the concrete operational stages of development are typically unable to analyze and generalize thematic statements about stories. Children were given access to books as points of reference during the interview and were also given time to draw a picture about what the books were about. This presumably focused the children on the thematic content of the stories and gave them an opportunity to consider themes for the books.

Children in low-exposure groups in all three grades tended to speak in absolutes, whereas children in high-exposure groups tended to offer qualifiers in their responses to books, indicating a wider range of experience which might relate to background knowledge of the world.

Identification and generation of theme in relation to genre

Children were most successful with the identification and generation of themes for realistic fiction. Part of this may be related to the content of both genres used for the study. The child is closer to themes of realistic fiction experientially. Folktale themes of greed, sacrifice, gaining independence and overcoming evil or danger are abstract concepts when related in folktales in settings removed from everyday experience. Regardless of high-exposure or low-exposure group position children were able to successfully identify realistic fiction selections, but were slightly less successful with identifying themes of folktales--except for the kindergarten low-exposure group--which suggests a tacit knowledge of how the world operates, since not all children were able to generate themes.

Conclusion

Since exposure to children's literature had a strong correlation to the child's level of thematic awareness, teachers might be encouraged to provide students with a rich literature background in a variety of genres including historical fiction, folktales, information books, fantasy, realistic fiction and biography. Giving children opportunities to listen to books and to read books in the classroom can increase the child's background knowledge about the world and can improve the child's ability to comprehend (Pearson, 1981).

Giving children the opportunity to talk about their ideas regarding the book can help them talk about themes and explore character motivation and elements of plot. The notion of right and wrong regarding discussion of books is less useful than the notion of sharing ideas within the context of a classroom community where the individual is allowed and encouraged to talk about meaning in books and stories read. Several fourth-grade children made this clear when they offered their answers and asked timidly, "Is that the right answer?" The assurance that anything they shared was acceptable was greeted with relief by all but one child who insisted on knowing what the right answers were. Children need encouraging contexts in which to query and offer their insights. This is difficult to accomplish when one is preoccupied with finding the "right" answer.

Paley's (1981) goals for the children in her classroom included the development of logical thinking accompanied by the language skills necessary to articulate those thoughts. Consequently she provided a classroom atmosphere in which books were widely read and children were encouraged to respond to books shared in class. Her experience with Tico and the Golden Wings by Loe Lionni with that group of kindergarten children neatly sums the focus that classrooms might adopt. Whereas she viewed Tico as a nonconformist, the children unanimously viewed Tico as a "threat to the community."

Future studies might explore interactive group contexts in which books are shared and discussed and the child's perspective is valued.

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17 A STUDY OF DIVERSE RESPONSES TO AN ALLEGORICAL TEXT

Claudia Gentile and Sharon Kane

Introduction

Researchers and practitioners recently have been calling attention to the role the study of literature plays in students' overall education. Some call for an increase in the use of literature in the elementary classroom, as a vital component of early literacy instruction. (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). Recent research on the relationships between high school students' perceptions of story characters and their perceptions of their peers indicates that the study of literature enhances adolescents' understanding of themselves, their peers and the world around them (Hynds, 1987). Some educators argue that students of all disciplines should study literature because of the positive role its study plays in their cultural and professional development (Gamble, 1986). Thus, it is important to increase our understanding of how students of various ages respond to literature and how to best teach literature in schools.

Some literary theorists and reading researchers propose that one of the most effective ways of introducing and studying literature in the classroom is to use a literary theory which is grounded in students' responses (Reader Response Theory) as the basis for instructional programs (Chase & Hynds, 1987; Cooper, 1985; Rosenblatt, 1978). Reader Response Theory emphasizes the importance of beginning with, accepting and encouraging students' individual responses to texts. Under this theory, teachers are encouraged to give students the opportunity to respond freely, honestly and informally to the literature they study, and to use students' responses as a basis for developing their aesthetic sensibilities and response repertoires (Rosenblatt, 1976; Tompkins, 1980).

Reader Response theorists emphasize the individuality of responses, as well as the dynamic and recursive nature of the response process (Rosenblatt, 1976; Iser, 1978, 1980; Holland, 1968, 1975; Britton, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c; Applebee, 1973, 1978). However, while they call attention to the role the reader plays in any given reading of a text, they also concur that the text itself limits and guides individual responses, that an individual reader's interpretation must be plausible and acceptable within a broader community's overall knowledge of literature (Britton, 1982a; Culler, 1975; Fish, 1970; Rosenblatt, 1968, 1976, 1978). These two aspects of Reader Response Theory, individuality and plausibility, cause problems for classroom teachers who try to develop instructional activities based on this theory. How does one decide if a student's response is plausible or not? Who decides? When is this decision made?

Reader Response Theory

Several Reader Response theorists have explored the ways in which a reader's response to a text can be unique, yet at the same time plausible to other readers. Rosenblatt (1976) states that individuals will have distinctive responses to literary works; they will respond with different images, feelings and ideas to the same text because of their varied experiences and knowledge. At the same time, readers' comprehension of the text will be similar and their responses will be similar to the extent that their experiences and knowledge are similar. Rosenblatt does not assert that any interpretation is acceptable, rather, she establishes two criteria for judging the validity of responses: (1) that "the reader's interpretation not be contradicted" (1978, p. 115) by the text, and (2) that "nothing be projected for which there is no verbal basis" (1978, p. 115). Responses can not be judged as correct or incorrect, but as more or less appropriate, in relation to the text (Rosenblatt, 1968, 1976, 1978).

Britton (1982a, 1982b, 1982c), while emphasizing the significance of the individual in creating meaning in a literary text, notes that the interaction between the individual reader and the text is not totally free, since it involves a set text. Fish (1980) also focuses on the uniqueness of individuals' responses to literature, but emphasizes that certain aspects of people's backgrounds, experiences and personalities place them within the same "interpretive communities". Thus, while each response is unique in some ways, in other ways it has certain things in common with other responses. Applebee (1973, 1978) asserts that verbal responses to literary works will be both objective (about the facts of setting, characters, or some other kind of information verifiable in the text) and subjective (identification with characters, involvement in a story, insights affecting the reader's understanding of the world, responses not verifiable in the text). Accordingly, certain aspects of a reader's response can be judged as plausible in relation to the text.

Thus, Reader Response Theory indicates that one might look at the role the text plays in the response process in order to further explore the gray area between individuality and plausibility of responses. For example, in certain literary genres, such as allegory and satire, the author's choice of genre indicates certain parameters of interpretation. It could be argued that a literal reading of an allegorical text can produce an interpretation so at variance with the author's intentions that the literal reading is implausible. Thus, an examination of readers' responses to an allegorical text, in terms of whether or not the readers perceive the allegorical level of the text's meaning, would provide insight into the issues of individuality and plausibility of response.

The participants of this study were asked to read an allegory--Dr. Seuss' (1984) The Butter Battle Book. A literal interpretation of the book might be that Dr. Seuss is encouraging people to fight over silly things (which side of the bread to put their butter on). This interpretation is not only highly implausible, but is the opposite of an allegorical reading of the book, (that Dr. Seuss is showing how silly the nuclear arms build-up is by equating it with a fight over how to butter one's bread). Thus, an examination of the various ways in which students of different age groups respond to this allegory will increase our understanding of the role one aspect of text, its genre, plays in influencing readers' responses and will enable us to discuss further the issue of plausibility.

Developmental Studies

Reader Response Theory has been successful in focusing the attention of reading researchers and practioners away from the notion that there is one correct reading of a literary text--the reading which is rooted in the text--and on to the role the reader plays in the literary experience. However, this has been done from a very individual standpoint, where an ideal reader often is substituted for an ideal reading of the text (deBeaugrande, 1987). Also, the role differences in readers' levels of cognitive development play in the variations in their responses has not been explored in depth.

Recent research on the influences of cognitive development on students' reading and writing skills indicates that one's ability to take perspectives, relate to a text, relate a text to the world, understand a text, and generalize from the text is dependent upon one's stage of cognitive development (Barritt & Kroll, 1978; Emig, 1983; Flower & Hayes, 1977). However, few studies, to date, have compared the responses of students of different developmental levels to the same text (Applebee, 1978). Thus, this study examined the responses of 3rd, 5th, 8th and 11th grade students in order to explore developmental differences in their responses.

Previous developmental research on children's responses to literature found that children in the early elementary grades responded to stories on a literal level and retold the story; children in the mid-elementary grades were able to summarize the story on a literal level; children in their early teens were able to analyze the story elements and identify with the characters and situations; and students in their late teens were able to generalize about the meaning or theme of the story and relate it to their understanding of the world (Applebee, 1978).

In light of these views, and the nature of The Butter Battle Book's genre, (allegory), we hypothesized that the third, fifth, and, to some extent, eighth graders would view the text literally and thereby misinterpret its main theme; whereas, some eighth graders and most tenth graders would be able to relate the book to the real world and generalize about its main theme, realizing that it is an allegory.

Methodology

Subjects. Two classes of students at each of the third, fifth, eighth and tenth grades, from a suburban school district in Central New York State participated in the study. This range of grade levels was chosen because preliminary case studies revealed that students as old as college freshmen often misinterpreted the theme of the book, expressing disappointment that Dr. Seuss would "encourage violence" in a children's book, while children as young as eight years old could understand the "lesson" the story expresses. Thus, in order to explore at what age students develop the ability to recognize allegory and how students of different age groups might respond to this type of text, students at the early elementary, late elementary, middle school and high school grades were asked to participate. (Note: a future study will explore the responses of college freshmen to The Butter Battle Book.)

Materials. Dr. Seuss' The Butter Battle Book was chosen because, although it was written by a noted author of children's books, in the format of a children's book, its theme of a military arms build-up between two countries, presented allegorically, is appropriate for people of all ages, so much so that librarians interviewed said that they had difficulty in knowing how to classify the book within their library systems (Kane, in preparation). Also, preliminary study showed that the theme, the ambivalence of its ending and its genre (allegory) seemed to enhance the variation in individuals' responses to this book. Indeed, when The Butter Battle Book first was published, its theme, genre and ending received both strong criticism and praise from educators and the public (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1986; Gutis, 1987). Thus, The Butter Battle Book was chosen because it is an allegory which can be read by people of all ages and people respond to it in a wide variety of ways.

Administration Procedures. The participants were asked to read and respond in writing to the book. Students were provided with copies of the book; the book was then read out loud to them. Afterwards, they were asked to respond to the book in writing, in any way in which they wanted. There was no time limit on this activity. When all were done, participants were asked to write down what they thought the central idea or the "message" of the book was.

Many well-known Reader Response studies have used checklists, multiple choice questions, response grids and questionnaires to assess the variety of response patterns of students (Applebee, 1978; Cooper, 1970; Cooper & Mickalack, 1981;

Purves, 1973). Others have used free written responses (Dollerup, 1971; Wilson, 1966). The use of checklists and response grids with children has been questioned by researchers who emphasize that there are qualitative, as well as quantitative, differences between the thinking processes of children, adolescents and adults (Petrosky, 1976). Also, the use of checklists and grids, or any other pre-set material which expresses other people's views of the text, may influence the reader's response to the text, acting as an intermediary between the reader and his/her initial reading of the text. Hence, these checklists and grids, while giving information about the readers' opinions in a way that facilitates comparison, may or may not capture the readers' immediate, unique and individual responses to the text.

Thus, free written response was chosen as a method that: (1) would be appropriate for all age levels involved in this study; (2) would not influence students' responses; and (3) would be consistent with the basic sense of Reader Response Theory--to root all discussion of literature first in the unique, individual response of the reader. Because students were given total freedom in responding to the book, the "main theme" question was asked after the free response, to enable us to more adequately assess whether or not the reader perceived an allegorical level of meaning in the text.

Response Analysis. Participants' responses were read several times, by two readers. The readers re-read the responses by grade level, developing categories to describe the variety of response types within each grade level, and within each response. Then, across-grade comparisons were made, according to category types, average number of words per response, and percentages of responders within grade levels whose responses could fit into more than one category.

Many well-known Reader Response studies have used pre-set categories of response types when describing and measuring readers' responses. In a study of the oral responses of 52 readers to four short stories, during and after reading, Squire (1964) identified seven categories of responses: (1) literary judgment; (2) interpretive; (3) narrational; (4) associational; (5) self-involvement; (6) prescriptive judgment; and (7) miscellaneous or irrelevant. Through an analysis of the views of literary critics, teachers and students, Purves and Rippere (1968) identified five types of responses: (1) perception; (2) engagement; (3) interpretation; (4) evaluation; and (5) miscellaneous. Purves (1973) used these categories in a landmark study of adolescents' responses to literature in ten countries. These five categories have been used by other researchers (Cooper, 1970; Angelotti, 1972) and were further refined by Purves and Beach (1972), Odell and Cooper (1976) and Cooper and Michalak (1981).

However, some researchers have questioned the use of pre-set categories for exploring and describing the responses of readers of various ages. Applebee (1973, 1978) noted that the categories should not be weighted equally since evaluative responses often included perception, engagement and interpretation. Erikson (1984) emphasized that pre-set categories are insensitive to the topic of responses and to questions of the plausibility of responses as they relate to the text. Thus, in this study, the students' responses were used as the source of category development in order to capture more accurately the variations within each age group and across age groups.

Results

In presenting the results, a general descriptive profile of how each age group responded to the text will be given first, followed by a discussion of how an allegorical reading of the text was or was not reflected in the free responses and main idea responses of each age level.*

Third Graders. The thirty-seven third graders were story writers and artists. Eighteen percent of their responses contained no words--only drawings. In all, 62% drew some kind of picture as part of their responses. Seventy percent wrote some kind of narrative (See Figure 1). About half of these stories were told in the first person, half in the third person. Thirty-five percent of the stories, at first glance, seemed to be unrelated to the book (See Figure 2). However, the common theme of fighting and/or war in 23% of these stories could be considered an offshoot of the theme of the book.

FIGURE 1

> Once there lived a yook who disliked a dirty Zook. The yook was a guard of the wall. He guarded it well until one day a bad zook swiped his weapon. He got so mad he shot his gun kick-poo-kid right at zook Zanitch.

The third graders who did not write stories wrote either affective comments, such as "I liked the Butter Battle Book, the war and machines"; or evaluative comments, like, "It was a good story . . . They are such werd names Zooks and Yooks who ever herd such a thing!" One person summarized the story ("The Zooks and the Yooks were fitting about what whay the butter sould be what ever inventen the Yooks did the Zooks whould have the same the last of the story.") (See Appendix A for a diagram of the third graders' responses.)

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*Note: Participants' responses have been quoted verbatim; no attempt has been made to correct grammatical or mechanical errors.

FIGURE 2

Freddy has killed Jason. Jason and Freddy had a dog fight. Jason lost. Freddy teared Jason to shredds. Freddy had his claw Jason had his jackknife then. Chris S. came in with this squirt gun then he squirted Freddy in the face. Then Freddy killed Chris S. And Freddy used Chris S.'s squirt gun for a while. Then superman came. Then the smurfs came in with little rocketlaunchers.

Fifth Graders. The forty fifth graders were, again, mostly story writers; 47% wrote some type of narrative. Seventy percent of these narratives provided endings for the book. There was a great diversity of ways in which they chose to end the book. Some had both sides drop the bomb and then repair the wall afterwards; others had the bomb drop and everyone die; several had the bomb drop and everyone live happily ever after; and one person sent the two men who were fighting to the planet Mars so that there would be no more trouble.

Compared with the third graders, a larger proportion of the fifth graders responded affectively (14%) and evaluatively (16%). More fifth graders wrote summaries as part of their responses, such as "I think that this story was pretty good. It was funny that when ever the yooks made something new the zooks would make the same thing." In general, their use of summary was more elaborated than that of the third graders (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

> The story has said that there where the Zooks, and the Yooks. The Yooks ate butter, and bread right side up, and the Zooks ate butter, and bread up-side-down. The Zooks, and the Yookes had a Butter Battle. They where fighting who and how they should eat bread, and butter. Each of them made weapons but it seemed to never work. But finally it started. The weapons that the Zooks, and the Yooks made where the same!
>
> T
> h
> end

Several new categories emerged in the fifth graders' responses. Five percent made predictions about whether or not the bomb would be dropped, such as "I think that grampa yook and Van Itch won't drop the bomb and maybe become friends" and "Grandpa will drop the big boy boomeroo before Van itch and cat Van itches big-boy boomeroo." Four percent related the story to the world in some way. One person related the story to his own habits, "At the end they both drop the big boy-boomeroo and they land on the side of the zooks and they won the battle and they were friends once again. And for ever they ate the butter right side up. That was great because thats how we eat are bread and butter." Another mentioned nuclear war in his story about how the book might end. Five percent suggested solutions to the problem (See Figure 4). (See Appendix B for a diagram of the fifth graders' responses.)

Eighth Graders. From the forty-six eighth graders, there was a much wider diversity of response types. Only one person wrote a narrative and only four people made affective comments.

FIGURE 4

> I liked the story. I think that instead of them fighting about wheather to eat the butter side up or down, they can complamize and the one side can eat it with the butter side up and the other side can eat it with the butter side down. Now both sides can eat the bread the way they want to instead of fighting over it.

Here, the great evaluator emerged. This group criticized everything; everything from the story (I think that the Butter Side Up is a very cute book!"); to the characters ("I thought that Van Itch was a sly and sneaky little man who spyed on the Yooks's inventions"); to the illustrations ("The drawings fit the story plot"); to the language ("there was a lot of rhyming and it is kind of cute but very amusing"); to the activity itself ("The story itself is wierd and has no point but doing anything but English is fun."). In all, 32% of the responses contained some type of evaluative comments.

The number of summaries (9%), predications (6%) and suggestions (6%) were almost the same as those of the fifth graders. However, the number and manner of relating the story to the world changed. Twenty-one percent of the responses in some way related the story to the reader's life or to the world in general (See Figure 5). Words like "the arms race", "World War III", "U.S. and Russia", and "nuclear warfare" often were used.

FIGURE 5

> I think this book is just another view of the modern nuclear devices its just showing that if one part of the world makes a weapon the other side will try to make one the same or even more powerful.

At this stage, 6% made some type of inference about the events of the story; while 12% commented on the story type. For example, "I think that the book was true. Dr. Seuss expresses his feelings about the arms build up (US and USSR) with a 'pretend' childrens story". Ten percent expressed some awareness of this as a children's book. "The Butter Battle Book was very interesting. I think most young children would enjoy it." And "I think this story was OK but I wouldn't suggest it for any one older than 10 years old". One person even suggested censoring the book, "In a way I think this book should be banned! If an child reads it they might learn to hate the other side." (See Appendix C for a diagram of the eighth graders' responses.)

Tenth Graders. As expected, by tenth grade a more mature responder emerged. The fifty-one tenth grade responses were spread out over ten response types. Evaluation (30%), relation to real life (20%) and comments on the story type (12%) remained the predominant response types. Like the eighth graders, this group evaluated everything, from the activity itself ("This was certainly a change in pace"); to the story ("The story was funny because of the rythm, the names of the people and the reason of conflict."); to the illustrations ("The illustrations add to make it exciting"). However, where the eighth grade evaluative comments merely stated that something was good or bad, the tenth grade evaluative comments explained why.

Only 2% made an overt inference about the story--"My immediate reaction was that the boys in the back room were the same for both people (sides)." Once again, this type of inference involves the whole story and a sophisticated understanding of how the world works, whereas the eighth grade inferences only involved aspects of the literal action in the story. There was one censor in the group, yet she seemed to change her mind in mid-response, "The story conveys a feeling of hate for people who are different, I don't think children should be told to do this at such a young age. It also talks of war which can also be bad, but maybe it is good to teach kids about it, so they aren't quite so afraid."

New to this age group was a type of response in which people commented on the effect the book had had on them as a reader (9%-See figure 6). Several were certain that kids could not understand the theme of the book. "It wasn't meant for tenth graders but it was meant for little kids like second or third grader. I'm sure the little kids couldn't understand the theme to this, but we could". (This reader's main theme response was "keep on trying until you succeed".) (See Appendix D for a diagram of the tenth graders' responses.)

FIGURE 6

Good, gets you mad because There is no Ending and it makes You decide.

* * * *

First the book started out as a fun story but I then realized that it had a relation to how the world is actually today.

* * * *

> It is a nice story because it also lets your mind wander and makes you think a little more about what your reading.

As can be seen in Table 1 below, 24% of the third graders, 28% of the fifth graders, 50% of the eighth graders and 59% of the tenth graders showed, through either their free responses or their response to the question, "What do you think the main theme or idea of this story is?", that they were aware of an allegorical level of meaning in the text. This means, in turn, that 76% of the third grade, 72% of the fifth grade, 50% of the eighth grade and 41% of the tenth grade responses did not indicate an interpretation of the text beyond the literal reading.

TABLE 1

AWARENESS OF MAIN THEMES

GRADE	FREE RESPONSE*	MAIN THEME RESPONSE	TOTAL
3RD	3%	21%	24%
5TH	0%	28%	28%
8TH	22%	28%	50%
10TH	10%	49%	59%

(*Note: An awareness of main themes in the Free Response was included only if the responder did not show an awareness of an allegorical level in the Main Theme Response.)

We accepted as an allegorical reading any comments that stated: "no one way is right", "don't judge people by their habits", "don't fight over silly things", "war is futile", or any reference to the arms race, nuclear war or the current situation between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. We did not accept as an allegorical reading statements such as: "Someone can always be as good as you are so you don't have to be the best", or "Life is competitive, so keep on trying, no matter what". Fifteen percent of the eighth graders and 16% percent of the tenth graders made these types of statements. Likewise, 18% of the third graders, 25% of the fifth graders, 4% of the eighth graders, and 6% of the tenth graders commented that the main theme of the book was to teach one to butter one's bread the right way. These types of responses were coded as non-allegorical.

Discussion.

In general, the sophistication of vocabulary and sentence structure increased over the age range. As the readers got older, the language they used to respond to the story seemed to be further away from the language of the story itself. Related to this, only the younger groups, the 3rd and 5th graders, played with the language in their responses (see Figure 7).

FIGURE 7

> As they stood on the wall, they looked each other in the eye.
>
> The yook said, "What if the wall was just a little more high.

And the zook looked at him with a sigh, and said "It might be better if the wall was more high".

They stood and stood looking at each other.

And the Zook took out bread and took out some butter.

And saw the field all filled with cattle.

And that was the end of "The Great Butter Battle!"

* * * *

Grandpa was in danger, and so was I,
If one dropped a bomb, you can kiss us
Good-by.

Gradpa was mad, and so was vanitch,
My Grandpa yelled don't drop it, you snitch.

The tree I was on started to shake,
It fell on vansnitch, I yelled, for goodnes
sake.

Me and Grandpa were very afraid,
If the bomb hits the ground, I will die,
afraid.

Grandpa caut van itch and his bomb, too.
The yooks were safe, hip, hip, you-too-hoo.

Granpa make frieds with weird vanitch,
He turned out nice, he's not a snitch.

The zooks became freinds with all the yooks,
You can read this story in special books.

The literature on children's responses indicated that the older students' responses would be longer than those of the younger students. This was not the case in this study (See Table 2). The average number of words per response for third grade was 41, for fifth grade was 58, for eighth grade was 39 and for tenth grade was 46. While the lengths of their responses were similar, only 5% of the third graders used more than one response type; 28% of the fifth graders used more than one response type; 60% of the eighth graders did and finally 86% of the tenth graders responses contained more than one response type. (See Table 3) Thus, as the students got older, the variety of response types within a single response increased.

Table 2
NUMBER OF WORDS IN RESPONSES

	X	SD	RANGE
3rd	41	28	0-121
5th	58	28	16-114
8th	39	31	6-149
10th	46	27	5-120

Table 3
NUMBER OF RESPONSES CONTAINING MORE THAN ONE RESPONSE TYPE

3rd	5%
5th	28%
8th	60%
10th	86%

Based on previous studies of children's responses (Applebee, 1978), we expected to find that the younger children would basically narrate or retell the story on a literal level. While this was true in general, most of their retellings involved adding endings to the story. In fact, 50% of the third grade narratives and 70% of the fifth grade narratives were only story endings. This seems to represent more than simply retelling the story and involves a greater degree of involvement with the story than previous research has indicated. In addition, a few third and fifth graders were able to conceptualize, to go beyond the concrete, making evaluative statements, summaries, predictions and suggestions. At the same time, some tenth graders responded in predominantly concrete ways and seemed to interpret the story literally. Thus, our understanding of how these age levels respond to literature needs to go beyond the labels of "literal", "narrative", "interpretive", and "evaluative", for, while these terms are effective ways of coding the written response, they do not adequately reflect the cognitive processes involved in producing a response.

Also, although previous research indicates that the ability to analyze story elements and identify with characters develops in adolescence, when the 3rd graders wrote stories in the first person, they were identifying with the characters in the story. When the 5th graders made predictions or suggestions for how to solve the book's problem, they were interacting with the text in a way that involved analysis of the story elements. Finally, although the ability to generalize about the main theme or meaning of a story (and to relate it to the world) is considered to develop in late adolescence, many of our 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders understood the main theme of the book and applied it to their world, whereas many 10th graders did not.

Implications

One purpose of this study was to see if one aspect of the text (genre) could be used to explore the plausibility of the free responses of students of different ages to a story. What we found was that a surprisingly high number of third and fifth graders were aware of an allegorical level of meaning in the text, and a surprisingly high number of tenth graders seemed unaware of the allegory in the text.

While the responses of the students in the 3rd, 5th and, to some extent, 8th grade who did not recognize the allegory in the text could still be considered plausible and typical of their age groups' level of cognitive development, the responses of the 10th graders who did not recognize an allegorical level could be considered implausible and inappropriate to their age level's stage of cognitive development. A 10th grader who says that the main idea of the book is "to butter your bread on the right side" could be joking. However, a 10th grader who says that the main idea is "to keep on trying until you succeed" is missing a vital aspect of the book's meaning.

Thus, the use of a variety of genres in literature class and a discussion of how the genre itself shapes the meaning of the text and influences the responses of readers would be a valuable way of teaching literature and exploring with students the gray area between plausibility and individuality of response.

Another goal of this study was to further explore the responses of readers of various ages in terms of their levels of cognitive development. While, in general, the responses of the older readers in this study reflected a way of relating the text to the world and to themselves that was more sophisticated than that of the younger readers (i.e. they gave reasons to explain why they thought the text was enjoyable, they made inferences about the motivation of the characters), the younger readers also related the text to themselves and their world, but in a different way. For example, a 5th grader explained that the main theme of the book was to butter your bread on the top because if you buttered it on the bottom, it would get all over your pants and your mother would get angry at you and have to wash your pants. Since the ways in which children perceive the world differ qualitatively from the ways in which adults perceive the world, when children relate a book to their lives they do it in qualitatively different ways.

Thus, coding and describing a 3rd grader's retelling of a story as a literal response does not adequately represent the cognitive factors involved in that retelling, especially if the retelling involves adding an ending. It does not capture the reader's level of imaginative engagement in the story, his/her level of identification with the characters and situation of the story or his/her creativity in using the whole sense of the story plus his/her own imagination to develop an ending or a new version of the story.

Hence, researchers and teachers interested in describing and exploring the variety of ways in which readers of different age groups respond to literature need to develop more accurate and effective means for understanding the levels of cognitive development as they relate to the various age groups' responses to literature.

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APPENDIX A

3RD GRADERS

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65

DRAWINGS ONLY
NARRATIVES
AFFECTIVE
EVALUATIVE
SUMMARY
PREDICTION
SUGGESTION
RELATED TO WORLD
INFERENCES
STORY TYPE
CENSORSHIP
EFFECT ON READER

APPENDIX B

5TH GRADERS

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65

DRAWINGS ONLY
NARRATIVES
AFFECTIVE
EVALUATIVE
SUMMARY
PREDICTION
SUGGESTION
RELATED TO WORLD
INFERENCES
STORY TYPE
CENSORSHIP
EFFECT ON READER

APPENDIX C

8TH GRADERS

	0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65
DRAWINGS ONLY														
NARRATIVES														
AFFECTIVE														
EVALUATIVE														
SUMMARY														
PREDICTION														
SUGGESTION														
RELATED TO WORLD														
INFERENCES														
STORY TYPE														
CENSORSHIP														
EFFECT ON READER														

APPENDIX D

10TH GRADERS

	0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65
DRAWINGS ONLY														
NARRATIVES														
AFFECTIVE														
EVALUATIVE														
SUMMARY														
PREDICTION														
SUGGESTION														
RELATED TO WORLD														
INFERENCES														
STORY TYPE														
CENSORSHIP														
EFFECT ON READER														